

EIGHT
SERMONS

PREACHED

On Several Occasions.

BY

NATHANAEL WHALEY,

Rector of *Broughton* in *Northamptonshire*.

L O N D O N,

Printed for *John Everingham* at the
Star in *Ludgate-Street*, near the West
End of *St. Paul's Church-Yard*, 1695.

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*Carolus Alston R. P. D.
Hen. Episc. Lond. a Sa-
cris.*

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BY
NATHANIEL W. HALE,
Pastor of Brighton in Northamptonshire.

L O N D O N

Printed for John Borthwick at the
Star in Ludgate-street, near the West
End of St. Paul's Church-yard, 1807.

THE
PREFACE
TO THE
Reader.

THE true End of Printing
Sermons, is to promote
the Belief and Practice of Chri-
stianity: Which must be at a
low Ebb, while the Witty parts
of the World is Floating in *Scep-
ticism*, and the Heavier sinking in-
to down-right *Atheism* and *Sensu-
ality*. And This, I think, is for
good an End in it self, that it
certainly needs no Excuse. For
I know not why any Man may
not venture upon doing Good,
without asking leave of the World,

Design

A

or

The Preface to the Reader.

or Pleading the Importunity of Friends, or craving a Protection for it. All the Discouragement lies in the Difficulty there is in reaching this Excellent End, especially in this Singular and Confident Age; in which He is no Body almost that has not an Opinion by himself: And he is counted a very easy Man, that will resign it to a stronger Judgment, for being seduced to a Contradiction or two, or convinc'd of a few untoward Consequences of it. But however this be, I think it becomes the Ministers of Religion to perswade Men (if it be possible) to be Wise and Happy, and while the Scriptures are of any Authority with them, to Admonish them of the Truths which belong to their Eternal Peace. And this I can truly say, is the
to A Design

The Preface to the Reader.

Design of the following Sermons;

The two first of which are framed to shew the great Difference there is between a stable and well-grounded Faith, and meer Confidence and Opinion; or between the Faith of *Abraham*, which carried him through the greatest Tryals and Difficulties, and the Presumption of a Pharisee, which did as strange things in their kind. For as *Abraham* by Faith offered up his Son in Obedience to God: So *Saul* by the impulse of his Opinions, Persecuted the Children of *Abraham's* Faith, and verily thought, till our Saviour called to him out of Heaven (as the Angel did to *Abraham*) that he was doing the Will of God, even when he was going to make a Sacrifice of Christianity it self.

• The Design of the Third and

The Preface to the Reader.

Fourth Sermons, is to represent the extream Danger of Impenitency under the Powerful means of Grace, and of Trusting to a late or Death-Bed Repentance. These, I fear, are very Grating and Unpleasant Subjects; But I the rather think they require the plainer dealing; and must needs say in reference to the Latter, that upon the Review, I cannot esteem it any breach of Charity to have wrested a Text (perhaps more frequently mis-applied than any other in the Gospel) out of the hands of those that were never Fairly in possession of it, and are apt (as *St. Peter* speaks of some others) to wrest it to their Own Destruction.

The Fifth was delivered at a time, when great Endeavours were used to turn us out of the streight
Way

The Preface to the Reader.

Way to Heaven: Which gave occasion to shew the Grounds of our Protestant Faith, and the great Advantages it has above the Romish in point of certainty: How much Reason we have to adhere to the Doctrine of our own Church, and to adorn it by the Purity of our Lives and Examples. And the Way to do this, is described and recommended in the following Discourse concerning our Improvement in all Christian Vertues and Graces.

And were we once perswaded to govern our Lives by the Principles of our Religion, we might justly hope to Enjoy them more, and perhaps much longer than we do: We should think it no Dishonour to suffer those, that Affront and Despitefully use us, to live out the short term of Life,
which

The Preface to the Reader.

which God and Nature hath set them, and make better Use of the shortness and uncertainty of our Own; to bring us to which happy Temper, is the Design of the two last Sermons.

As to the Composure of these few Discourses, the Reader will find enough to exercise his Candour and Ingenuity. All I can hope for is, That they may be serviceable in some measure to the Lovers of Truth, for whose sakes they are Published; & that the Venture will be the more Pardonable, because my Infirmities at present are such as hinder the Discharge of the Ordinary Duties of my Function. God grant his Blessing to all Faithful Endeavours to Preserve the Truth, and Promote Peace and Piety.

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The Contents.

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Matth. 11. 21, 22. Wo unto thee Chorazin, Wo unto thee Bethsaida, for if the mighty Works which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have Repented

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*Repented long ago in Sack-cloth and Ashes ;
But I say unto you, it shall be more to-
lerable for Tyre and Sidon in the Day of
Judgment, than for you.*

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a Vapour that appeareth for a little time, and
then vanisheth away.*

SERMON

Sermon I.

Concerning the Power and Efficacy of Faith.

Hebr. ii. 17, 18.

*By Faith Abraham when he was tryed,
Offered up Isaac; and he that had re-
ceived the Promises, Offered up his Only
begotten Son;*

*Of whom it was said, that in Isaac shall
thy Seed be called.*

THE Author of this Epistle
discourseth in this Chapter of
two Eminent Points of Know-
ledge; the Nature of Divine Faith,
and the mighty Power and Efficacy
of it. In the first Verse he calls it
ἐλπίς, *ἐλπίς*, a grounded Expecta-

tion

tion of things hoped for and *περγμάτων*
ἐλπίσαν ἢ βλέπομένων, a Conviction of
 ver. 3. 5. things not seen; such as the Creation
 &c.

of this, and the Existence of a better
 World. And this shews the Nature
 of Faith, to lye in a firm Persuasion
 of Truth and Promises, grounded up-
 on the Testimony of God, and not
 upon any sensible Evidence of the Re-
 ality of them.

And accordingly, The
 Holy Ministers of Faith is so much
 ver. 13. magnified in this Chapter, are said
 to have dyed in Faith, being perswa-
 ded of the Promises, and having em-
 braced them many Ages before the
 time was come for the accomplish-
 ment of them. Then, for the Power
 and Efficacy of this Grace, the Apostle
 tells us what Transcendent things it
 has done in Ancient times, and that
 by vertue of it, the Elders obtained

ver. 2. a good Report; by which he means,
 That the Great and Famous Actions
 Recorded of the Patriarchs and other
 Worthies in the Old Testament, were
 all owing to their Faith; by Faith
 they pleased God, bore up against
 the Malice of the World, subdued
 Kingdoms, and wrought Righteous-
 ness,

ness, in despite of the greatest Difficulties and the highest Discouragements. Many Instances he gives us of these Noble Flights of Faith; amongst which there is none in all respects more remarkable than the Example in the Text: By Faith Abraham when he was tryed, Offered up Isaac; and he that Received the Promises offered up his only begotten Son; Of whom it was said, that in Isaac shall thy Seed be called.

Two things are observable in these Words:

1. The Hardness of the Tryal which God made of Abraham, when he commanded him to offer up Isaac to Him.

2. The Issue of this Tryal, or the Victory of Abraham's Faith over all the Hardships and Discouragements which he met with in it. Both these were extraordinary, and being written for our Instruction, will surely afford us very useful Reflections in reference to our Faith and Practice.

I begin with the First, viz.

1. The Hardness of the Tryal, which God put Abraham upon, for the

Concerning the Power

the Discovery of his Faith and affiance in him. The Text calls it a Tryal, which implies that God commanded *Abraham* to offer up his Son; for had it been a Free-will Offering, without any Order or Direction from God (such as the Heathen Oblations were, when they Sacrificed their Children to their Idols) it had been a plain and horrid Act of Murther. Nor was it necessary (as some have Fancied) to clear the Righteousness of God and *Abraham* in this matter, that God should dispence with the Sixth Commandment, when he obliged the Patriarch to kill his Son, because it had been Murther to kill him without his Command: For that Commandment (as is plain by the case before us) Forbids only to Kill without Gods Authority; which *Abraham* never went about to do, and therefore needed no Dispensation for it. He had an Express Commiſſion from God, who is absolute Lord of Life and Death, and never barrs his Prerogative by his Laws, and may therefore use his Power as he pleases, and take away the Life of the most Innocent Person, as well

well by the Hand of a Father, and the Fire upon the Altar as by an Infection in the Air, by Lightning or Tempest, or any other Messenger of Death. And thus *Moses* tells us, that God Tempted *Abraham*, and bid him go and offer his Son upon a certain Mountain in *Moriab* for a Burnt Offering, *Gen. 22. 1, 2.* And herein lay the Sharpness of *Abrahams* Tryal, that either he must contend with God, and Dispute his Authority, or do the strangest thing that ever was done in the World to please him.

That we may the better understand the Case, let us consider what it was that God demanded of *Abraham*, as a Test of his sincerity towards Him, and what plausible Arguments a Person in his Circumstances might be supposed to frame against it.

1. First then, God commands him to Sacrifice his Son, than which nothing could be more surprizing, or unwelcome to him. Who ever heard of such an Act of Piety before, of so hard a Precept, or so Unlikely a way of pleasing God as this? What would

B an

an ordinary Faith have done, how would natural Reason have Pleaded in this case? Might not *Abraham* himself be supposed to reason thus? Must I then lay aside all Humanity, and imbrue my Hands in the Blood of my Own Son? Must I forget that I am a Father, and Destroy the Life which I gave? Does not Nature teach us to be Kind and Dutiful towards the Offspring of our own Bowels? And are not the Laws of Nature Engraven upon our Minds by the Finger of God himself? Has not the Reason which God has given me, hitherto condemned the Action which he now Commands? And tho' I know he is always Just and Good, and would do always that which I know would Please him, yet how can I hope to Please him by Destroying this Image in my own Child? What will the World say of me, who profess to worship God in the purest manner, should I Pollute his Altars with my Sons Blood, and do that strange and unaccountable thing, which must needs be a Scandal to his Holy Religion? So that a command as this was enough to put, not Nature

ture only, but Faith it self upon the stretch; and being perfectly New and Arbitrary, to fright Men from the Worship of God, which this Holy Man had been the Best Example, and the greatest Promoter of.

2. But then, God did not only command *Abraham* to Sacrifice his Son, but his Beloved and Only Son *Isaac*, i. e. his only Son by *Sarah* the Free-Woman, and true Mother of the Family, which was to convey an Universal Blessing to Mankind. Take now thy Son (saith God) thine only Son *Isaac*, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the Land of *Moriah*, and offer him there for a Burnt Offering. And this greatly increases the difficulty of *Abrahams* Obedience, that it should please God to demand not one out of many, but his Only Son, his *Isaac* whom he intirely loved, the only Joy of his Mother, and the only hope of the Family, which was to make the best figure of any other in the World. And now might not *Abraham* have said, Lord, must I bereave my self of the Child, which nothing but a Miracle of thine could raise out of my Aged Loins? Must I take away a

Gen. 22.

2.

Concerning the Power

Life, for which I would gladly Exchange my own? Will not all my Flocks and Herds afford an Acceptable Sacrifice to thee? All these I would freely offer, instead of that Innocent Lamb, in which all my Earthly Treasure and Comfort lies. *Let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak this once: Is not the Life of Sarah bound up in the Life of the Child?* How shall I answer the Death of Isaac to her? Or must I be the Instrument of two such Deaths at once, and when I have slain the Son, carry the Killing Tidings to the Unhappy Mother? Oh how great a freight was this Good Man driven into! when he must either have forfeited the Favour of God, or bereaved himself of all that was Dear to him in this World, by the strangest act of Obedience, that was ever heard of in it.

3. Another grand Discouragement to *Abraham's* Obedience was, that his Beloved *Isaac* was a Son of very great and glorious Promises, which his untimely Death must, without a Miracle, frustrate the completion of. For God had promised to make him the Father of a numerous Offspring, and that in him

him should all the Nations of the Earth be Blessed. And 'tis certain, That Gods Command to *Abraham* to offer up his Son, was not more expresse than his Promise concerning that very Son, of whom it was said, *That in Isaac shall thy Seed be called.*

And this starts a new Difficulty : For now the Question seems to be, whether *Abraham* was more obliged to obey Gods Injunction, than to Believe his Promises ; which would naturally suggest such thoughts to him as these. God has given me a Son, and in him a Promise of a blessed Seed, and a numerous Posterity ; If I execute his command, what will his promise signify ? Shall *Isaac* become a Father, when I have made him a Sacrifice ? when I have taken away his Life in Obedience to God, will he send him back to me ? Surely if he designed to do this, He that has been so gracious as to reveal himself upon several occasions to me, would not hide so great and joyful a Secret from me. 'Tis true, God has an unquestionable Right to my Obedience, but then he is pleased to give me a Right in his Promise : And since

He is not a Man that he should Repent, and since his promise was antecedent to his Command, may I not Interpret his Command by his Promise? And infer from hence, that whatever Tryal he is pleased to put me upon, yet having Promised to bless *Isaac*, and all Nations in his Seed, he does not really chuse that I should violate his Precious Life, and so stop the current of his future and choicest Favours to Mankind. But besides these perplexities,

4 *Abraham* had this disadvantage more, that Gods command required a speedy Execution : So that he had little or no time to settle his thoughts about it, and to suppress those Reasonings which we must allow to be very Natural in his Case. *Take now thy Son* (saith God) *thine only Son Isaac.*— A short warning for a man to part with an Only Son, especially one so endeared by Divine Favours, and Promises as *Isaac* was, and in that severe manner that *Abraham* was obliged to do. A small time for a Tender-hearted Father, to overcome the struggle between Faith and Nature, which it is hard to think

think the Father of the Faithful could be on this Occasion exempted from. And this makes the case much harder on *Abraham's* side, that he had but very little time to recollect himself, to quiet his Paternal Affections, and to settle his mind upon a Subject, so every way Entangled with Difficulties, and that required so much fineness and strength of Thoughts to clear his way through, and to come to a perfect Resolution with himself about it. So that, on all accounts, this Tryal of *Abraham* appears to be one of the forest and hardest Tryals which God ever Imposed upon any of his Faithful Servants.

I come now to the Second thing observable in these words, *viz.*

II. The Issue of this Tryal, or the Victory of *Abraham's* Faith over all the Hardships and Discouragements he met with in it. And here I shall distinctly consider these two Particulars.

First, The Compleatness of this Victory, and

Secondly, The Power or Principle by which it was wrought.

By Faith (saith the Apostle) *Abraham, when he was tryed, Offered up Isaac.*

I. For the first of these, the compleat-

pleatness of the Victory, we must remember that it lay in *Abrahams* Fulfilling the Command of God with an Undaunted Resolution, in despite of the Difficulties he was surrounded with, to which he proceeded by these following steps.

1. He immediately applyed himself to the Performance of Gods Command. When God had once declared his pleasure to him, 'tis said, he Rose up early in the Morning, and having
 Gen. 22.3 made all things ready for a Sacrifice, began his Journey to *Moriah*; which shews that he had a very quick and lively sense of his Duty to God in all Cases: And that what ever Tryal it might please God to make of him, he was provided for it before hand, and was not to be surprized by the most dashing or severe Injunction. And in this he was an admirable Pattern to the Servants of God in all Ages, of the greatest perfection which in this life they are capable of: I mean, a Constant Readiness and disposition to resign up themselves entirely to him, and to part freely with the very Choicest Blessings he is pleased to enrich them with.

2. He

2. He uses all the Prudence and caution, which the Tenderness of the Case did require. He keeps the matter to himself, least by taking Air, and coming to the Knowledge of his Wife or Son, it should awaken those Passions in them, which might tempt him to forego his Resolution. He gets up early in the Morning, takes *Isaac* his Son and two of his Servants with him: Gen. 22. 2, 3. Them he leaves at a convenient Distance, least they should obstruct his Design, and Him he leads on to the Place of Worship, telling him that God would provide himself a Lamb, the only thing which seem'd to be wanting for a Burnt-Offering. Thus he carries the matter with all imaginable advantage towards the Execution of his purpose; He keeps the secret from her that lay in the same Bosom with it; he makes no complaints of the Hardships he was put upon, Fastens no parting Kiss upon his Dying *Isaac*, nor betrays his Sad Intention, or any Reluctancy within himself, so much as by a single Sigh or Tear. And what more could the most Affectionate Father do, to save the Life of a beloved and

and only Son, than *Abraham*, but of pure Obedience to Gods Command, did to compass the Death of his? But more than this, *Gen. 22, 9, 10, 18* 13. He carried on his Obedience to the utmost point of Perfection. The Fatal Knife was in his Hand, his Son lay panting upon the Altar, and he was just giving the deadly stroke when the Angel called to him out of Heaven to stay his Hand, which if he had not done, he had certainly in a few moments sent *Isaac* thither. So that there was nothing wanting in *Abrahams* compliance with God in all that he required of him. He perfectly Resigned up his Will to him: He weaned himself from every thing that was dear to him in this World: He offered up his very *Isaac* so far, that there was but a moment between him and Death; and by that wonderful Act gave such a demonstration of his Piety and entire Dependence upon God, as procured this Glorious Testimony from him, *Now know I that thou fearest me, since thou hast not withheld thy Son, thine Only Son from me.* To all which may be added,

4. That this good Man never murmured

murred or faltered all the while he was upon his Tryal. One would think it was impossible for him to go through so severe a Task without repining at some or other of the Difficulties imposed upon him. One of us would be very apt to Fancy, that every time he cast his Eye upon his Son, and Talkt with him upon the Way to *Moriah*, Nature should make a stand, and his Heart should fail him, to think what a sad Uncomfortable Errand he was going upon. But we meet with nothing of all this in *Abrahams* deportment, during the whole process of his Tryal; He did not make a false step in three Days Journey to *Moriah*: He was so far from staggering at the strangeness of things, that he went on without delay, (and as far as appears by the History of this great Action) proceeded by even and constant steps, through all the Stages of his Tedious Duty. Even when he came to the Mountain which God told him of, had Gen. 22 9. built an Altar, and laid the Wood in order upon it, he did not so much as allow himself to say, must I now Burn the staff of my Old-Age, and the dearest

est Pledge of Gods Favour to me and all Ages of the World? So that we see, he perfectly overcame the Difficulties, and surmounted the Discouragements, which his way was obstructed with.

2. The Power or Principle by which this Transcendent Act of Righteousness was wrought, *i. e.* by which *Abraham* Prevailed with himself, and over all Discouragements, to offer up *Isaac*. The Apostle ascribes it to his Faith: Now Faith we know, is sometimes taken for an habitual Belief or Perswasion of the Perfections, Truths, and Promises of God, and sometimes for a single Act of this eminent Grace: and there are places, of which the Text is one, in which it is apparently Used in both senses.

1. *First* then, the honour of this Noble Action was owing to a constant and habitual Perswasion of Divine Truths and Promises, which *Abraham* had attained unto. He had been long accustomed to believe God upon his Word, and to rely upon his Truth and Faithfulness: And being fully perswaded of the Reality and concernment

ment of all that he Revealed to him, it was easie for him to conclude and settle upon this great Principle of Religion, *that God in all things was to be Obeyed.* And this Perswasion was the Root of all his Piety and Submission to the Will of God. Upon this he left his own Country for a strange Land, and followed the Clue of God's Providence whithersoever it led him; it directed his steps when he knew not whither he went, and put him into a posture of Undertaking the Hardest Tryals, and giving any proof of his Sincerity that God should demand of him. And accordingly when God demanded his Son, the Dearest thing he had in the World, tho' it was against the Law of Nature in any Case but his, to slay an Innocent Youth: Tho' it was in common esteem a Contradiction to all the Kindness and Tenderness which a Fathers Name carries in it, and no less contrary to the Endearments of the Conjugal Relation: Nay, though it had all the Visible Marks of Unnatural Rage and Inhumanity upon it, and was like to prove an Indelible Blemish to Religion; tho' these

these considerations were no less Obvious than Weighty, yet was *Abraham* (through the Constancy of his Faith and Obedience) so Naturaliz'd to the Service of God, that nothing could divert him from it.

But I confess this does not fully clear the main Difficulty implied in the Text, *Viz.* That *Abraham* should offer up his Son by Faith, while he Believed the Promises concerning his Seed; it being against common Sense or Reason, That if *Isaac* dyed without Issue, His Seed should be Blessed after him. So that *Abraham* might be a strong Believer, and do great things by his Faith; yet still it does not appear but that he must needs stagger, while he shook the very Ground and Foundation which his Faith and Hope had rested upon, as he did when he went about to destroy the promised Line, and so Cut off all the Blessings that depended upon it. Let us therefore have recourse to the second Notion of Faith, and Consider it as it signifies.

2. Some special and Eminent Act of this Grace. And such we find in the present case, namely a strong Persua-
sion,

tion of *Abraham* of the Power of God
 to raise up *Isaac* from the dead. And
 to this the context expressly ascribes
 his success: By faith *Abraham*, when
 he was tried, offered up *Isaac*; &c. *WAc.* v. 19. 1. 2.
counting (saith the Apostle) *that God*
was able to raise him up even from the
dead; i. e. that he had Power to ful-
fill his Promise by bringing Isaac to Life
again, and that he would certainly do
it, rather than suffer the least tittle of
his promise to Dye with him. And
 now his Way, tho' hard, was clear and
 open; and there was nothing to Inter-
 rupt his Obedience but what his Al-
 mighty Faith could deal withal. He
 had doubtless considered, that God had
 a better Interest in his Son, and all his
 other Possessions, than any he could
 lay claim unto. And the great Reve-
 rence he had for his Wisdom and So-
 verainty, Hush'd his Natural Affec-
 tions; and whereas God's Command
 seem'd to Oppose his promises, he o-
 vercame the Difficulty too, Believing
 that God was able to Reconcile them,
 and bring back *Isaac* from the Dead by
 the same Power that gave him his First
 Being, when he sprang from One (as
 is

is observed in this Chapter) that was as Good as Dead, that is Himself that had Out-lived the Natural Power of giving Life to others.

v. 12. We see then the Eminency of *Abraham's* Faith, and the support it gave him all along in his Tryal. By the Direction of it he kept his Eye all the while upon God's Command, and Wink't at all the seeming contradictions that Oppos'd his Obedience to it. He doubted not but that God had Power to Kill, and to make alive: To Command what he pleased, and Reward those that Diligently Seek and Obey him. In short, amidst all the hard things that bore upon *Abraham's* Faith, there was nothing appeared so Incredible to him, as that God should lye, or so unreasonable as to suspend his Obedience while he was Persuaded of God's Faithfulness to him; And accordingly he immediately followed him in the Light and strength of his Faith, without any Faultering or Regret; through all the Dark Scenes of that Cloudy Providence, which led him to the Sacrifice of his Only Son: And that after a most Express and Emphatical

phatical Promise, that in *Isaac* his Seed should be called.

And now 'tis time for us to Consider how far we are concerned in this Discourse, both in reference to our Faith and Practice. *First* then,

1. Hence we Learn the true Nature of Justifying Faith, there being nothing plainer in Scripture, than that *Abrahams* Faith was Imputed to him for Righteousness, which certainly it had never been, if he had not Obeyed the Command which was the Tryal of his Faith. If *Abraham* then was Justified by the Faith which offered up his Son, 'tis clear, that he was justified by a lively and working Faith. And that no other Faith than this can Justify, is evident if we consider, that *Abrahams* Faith is more than once Recommended in Scripture as the great Pattern and Exemplar of the Faith which Justifies, and that the Great Commendation of it lies in the Influence it had upon the Holiness and Obedience of his Life. And then, if we have not the same kind of Faith, that is, a Faith which makes us Obedient to the Will of God, we have

not that true and genuine Faith which Justifies. And therefore if we Believe, but do not obey the Truth, we must needs fall as short of the Favour of God as we do of the Faith of *Abraham*. For to speak freely, I cannot understand what Use there is of Faith, but to quicken us to do the Will of God, in order to our obtaining his Favour; And if this be the proper and only good Use of Faith, it follows, that if we separate Faith from Holiness and Obedience, it loses all the Virtue which it hath to Justify us: And then, if we are never so Orthodox in Points of Faith, what does it Profit, my Brethren? Can that Faith save us, which cannot procure our acceptance with God? Have not all Wicked Men that Believe the Truths of Christianity the same? *Nay the Devils* (as *St. James* observes) *Tremble* under as good a Faith as this.

Jam. 2. 19.

'Tis strange therefore, that any Man of Competent Reason should think that a Dry and Barren Faith, a Volatil nation in the Head, that never Reaches the Heart and Life, should put him into the happiest state that

that he can possibly attain to in this Life; Or that which makes him never the better Man, should yet make him the Favourite of God; That a Dead and Useless Faith should do him the greatest Kindness in the World, and Intitle him to Life Eternal.

Now if Justifying Faith be more than an Assent to Truth, if besides this it be a Vital Principle of Vertue and Holiness, we see what a perfect Dream the *Antinomian Doctrine* of Justification from Eternity is. For surely no Man was Justified by Faith so long ago, as from Eternity: And if we were justified from Eternity, our Faith comes too late to justify us, and then there can be no such thing as justifying Faith. And this the Patrons of this Opinion do not dissemble in their Descriptions of Faith, in which they represent it as a means only of Manifesting and Applying to themselves their Personal justification from Eternity. And is not this a fair step to the laying aside of the whole Gospel? For let any Impartial Man judge, what effect the Great Precepts and Motives of the Gospel are like to have upon

those Men that conceive they have but one thing to do, to satisfy themselves that they are in a justified state, and that is to Believe Roundly that they were so from Eternity.

2. We are taught by this Tryal not to stagger or Repine, at any sharp or Mysterious Providences, but to look upon them as the Wise Methods of God to prove our Sincerity, and to exercise our Faith in him. Of all the Excellent Men in Scripture, there is none that was honoured with more Eminent Tokens of Divine Favour and Acceptance, than *Abraham* was. He was styled the Friend of God, the Father of the Faithful Seed, and the Heir of the World: He was Familiarly Visited by Angels from Heaven, and Dignify'd with many special Revelations and glorious Promises; He was the Keeper of Gods Secrets, one whom he declared his Confidence in: Yea, was so Highly in his Favour, that God engaged himself by a Covenant with him to preserve true Religion in his Family in all future Ages, and gave him a Prospect of the Day of Christ, at almost two thousand Years Distance from

Rom. 4. 13.

Gen. 18. 17

Job. 8. 56.

from it. And besides this Instance, it has been no Unusual thing with God to single out the Best men for the sharpest Tryals, and to propose them as examples of Faith and *Patience* to their own and all succeeding Generations, as appears by the rest of the Worthies of this Chapter, and the best Histories of all Ages. Now shall we call this an Error of Providence, and conclude that all these Excellent Men were cast out of Gods Favour and Protection, because he call'd them to such Noble Tryals for the Honour and Vindication of their Faith? If not, we can infer nothing either against our selves, (while we study to please God) or against the Equity and goodness of his Providence, from the Troubles and Perplexities of this present Life, how extraordinary soever they may be for the Nature or Circumstances of them. We should consider rather, that good Men are the fittest to serve the Great ends of Providence, and to teach the World Submission to the Appointments of it, by their Afflictions and Tryals: And this clears at once the Wisdom and goodness of God in thus

training them up for those excessive Heights of Glory, which are prepared in Heaven for them.

3. The Carriage of *Abraham* in this Tryal may serve to convince the World that there is such a thing as Living by Faith; that is, serving God without Respect to Worldly Advantages, nay in view of the greatest Losses and disappointments that can be sustained by it. The looser part of Mankind has been always very apt to charge the sincere with pretending Religion for secular ends. Being willing to ease themselves of the shame of their wicked and Impious Lives, they would fain have the World believe, that there is no such thing as true Faith and Piety: That 'tis nothing but Hypocrisie, that gives some men the Reputation of being better than others: And that the Best love the World at their Hearts, as dearly as those that Proclaim their Passion for it, and professedly make their Court to it. And the truth is, it has cost the Servants of God very dear in their several Ages, to Undeceive the World in this matter, and to Vindicate the Honour of Religion
against

against the Scoffs and Infidelity of Men. For I doubt not but one special end of the Tryals, and Sufferings of Good Men, is to convince the World that Religion is a Reality, and that there are those that chearfully serve God upon the Faith and Hope of a Better Life, yea, tho' it cost them their very dearest Delights and Comforts in this. The Example in the Text is a Demonstration of this beyond all possibility of Evasion or Answer. And since *Abraham's* Children have the same Kind of Faith, which he himself was so Renowned for, I mean a Faith which carries them through the service of God, in Pursuit of a Heavenly Country, and a Kingdom which hath Foundations, this vindicates all True Believers to the end of Time, from the Foul charge of Hypocrisie, and doing their Works to be seen of Men. 'Tis the Character of their Family, *That they Believe him that is Invisible: That they live by Faith and not by Sense, and are all of them Men and Women, of the same Spirit and Ingenuity, tho' not in the same Perfection that Abraham*

ham was. And that there is, and always will be such a Family in the Earth, is as evident as the Covenant which God made with *Abraham*, when the Church was impaled in his little Family, and the Promise of our Saviour to His, *That the Gates of Hell shall not prevail against it.* And therefore they that are, and know that they are sincere, have no reason to value the Censures of Men. 'Tis enough that they seek to please God, and that he Knows their Integrity; for God is infinitely more than all the World besides; and if we are sincere, he cannot Judge otherwise of us: and then we are safe; our Reward is sure, and will be great in Heaven. We need not ask leave of Men to be what we are, or stand to their Courtesy to bring us into Favour with him that Judgeth Righteously; 'Tis enough in all reason, That God and our Consciences are Ready to Acquit us.

4. Lastly, The success of this Tryal should Inspire us with Zeal and Resolution to serve and please God in all instances of Obedience to him. There is no Duty too hard for a vigorous and Lively

Lively Faith : There is none but what the Servants of God have discharged before us. And when we reflect upon what our great Examples have done, and consider how nobly they have acquitted themselves in the same Race that is set before us, why should we not aspire to be as brave and Resolute as they were ; and to break through the Discouragements which could not hinder them from Running and finishing their Course with Joy? Did they Climb over the highest Difficulties ? And may not we be ashamed to couch under the ordinary hardships in Religion ? Did they depend upon God, when nothing but Miracles could Relieve their hopes in him ? And shall we distrust his goodness and Protection while we actually enjoy them, and he is pleas'd to continue so many Visible Tokens of his Favour and Concernment for us ? Did they leave their Country at God's Command ? And shall we think it too much but to leave the Vices of ours, which have long threatned to turn us out of Possession of it ? Again, did they stick at nothing to please God, not so much as at the
Offering

Offering of an Only Son? And shall we that have Better Promises than they had, Refuse him so Reasonable a Service, as to offer up our Souls and Bodies in holy Flames of Devotion and Love, which is the perfect and indisputable Will of God, and therefore must be extremely acceptable to him.

It's true, That without Faith it is Impossible to please God: But sure it is not Impossible to Believe, and so by virtue of our Faith to obey and please him; For this is the Argument of the whole Discourse in this Chapter, which out of the Sacred Annals of the Primitive Church, presents us with a Catalogue of many Eminent Believers, who became the favourites of God by their Faith and Obedience to him. And what is the Natural consequence of this? But that we, who have the same and in some Respects much greater Advantages than they had, should endeavour to shew the same greatness of Mind, and Invincible Resolution in Gods Service?

To Conclude, we have an Incomparable Pattern of Faith and Piety in the Text, *Abraham* the Friend of God, laying

laying himself at his Foot, and his Son upon his Altar, in Obedience to his Sovereign Will and Pleasure. How much more should we at Gods Command Sacrifice our Darling Lusts, that would destroy our Souls, since one of the two must dye? And this is a Sacrifice much cheaper, and no less Acceptable to God than *Abrahams* Oblation was: Micah. 6. 7, 8. More grateful to him than *thousands of Rams, or ten thousand Rivers of Oyl, Than if thou gavest thy First-born for thy Transgression, the Fruit of thy Body for the sin of thy Soul:* Offer this as the First fruits of thy Faith, without which, thy very Prayers will be turned into sin. Then shalt thou have favour in the sight of God, through the meritorious Sacrifice of his only Son; and by walking before him as *Abraham* did, may'st assuredly hope, after a short Tryal of thy Faith and Patience in this World, to sit down with *Abraham, Isaac* and *Jacob*, and all the Faithful in the Kingdom of God.

Which

Which God of his Infinite Mercy grant
 we may all do, through the Merits
 and Mediation of his Son Jesus Christ,
 to whom with the Father, and the Ho-
 ly Spirit, be Ascribed all Honour and
 Glory, Dominion and Power, now and
 for ever, Amen.

SERMON

of God. All the faithful in the Kingdom
 with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and
 concerning this World, is the down-
 throw Trial of thy Faith and Pati-
 did, may it assuredly hope, after a
 by walking before him as Abraham
 rious sacrifice of his only Son; and
 light of God, through the merito-
 They have have favour in the
 very Trials will be turned into fa-
 of thy Faith, without which, thy
 Soul: Offer this as the Fruit of
 Fruit of the Body for the life of the
 Trial-born for thy Transgression, the
 way of thy Trial, if thou hast any

Sermon II.

ON

The Danger of a Mis-inform'd
Conscience, or mistaken Prin-
ciples in Religion.

Acts 26. 9.

*I verily thought with my self; That I ought
to do many things contrary to the Name
of Jesus of Nazareth.*

THES E Words are part of the
Confession of an Eminent Con-
vert to the Christian Religion, A man
of Learning and Zeal, and Conscience:

Job

That

that had the Benefits of a Religious Education, and of great natural Endowments, and that made a more than an ordinary figure both in the Jewish and Christian Church. In the former he was a Ring-leader of the Sect of the Pharisees: A Sect, which perhaps till the Days of *Ignatius Loyola*, never had its equal in the World. And as the Pharisees of any party among the Jews were known to be the keenest against the Christians, so he owns himself to have been as errant a Pharisee, as hearty and as eager a Persecutor, as any of his Order. He was the Man by his own Confession, that shut up many of the Saints in Prison, and when they were put to Death for their Religion, he gave his Voice against them. Others he Punisht often in the Synagogues, and compell'd them to Blasphemy *i. e.* to Renounce their Faith in Christ, and to Curse him: Using the same Cruelty towards them which the Heathen Governours afterwards did; and those that refused this horrid Treachery to their Lord, he Persecuted into strange, that is, Heathen Cities. These things were contrary indeed

ver. 10. 11.

*Plin. Ep.
Tra. de
Christian.*

deed (and one would think should be always so esteem'd) to the Name of Jesus. But there is one thing in *St. Paul's* Confession which appears to be stranger than all this: And that is, that it was his Judgment and Conscience that made him thus severe to the Christians, and his Zeal to God and Religion that rais'd the Persecution against them. It was it seems the prevailing sense of his Mind, a Case he had determined within himself, that he ought to run down the Religion of Jesus. So he tells the King and Court in these Words, *I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the Name of Jesus of Nazareth.*

A hearty Champion you see, he had been against the Christian Religion: But how came he to fall into an Opinion, and to Espouse a Principle, that the worst Religion might well be ashamed of? The true account of it is, *St. Paul* had been a Right-bred Pharisee, having suckt in the Principles of that Superstitious Sect in his Childhood, and lived (till he became a Christian) exactly according to them, as
he

Acts 23.6

he tells King *Agrippa* in the hearing of the Jews at the fifth Verse of this Chapter. And therefore what he charges himself with, we are not to look upon as his own private persuasion only, but rather as an instance of the general sentiment of the Men of his way, and indeed as the Natural brood and Issue of Pharisaical Superstition.

By Superstition I mean a groundless Apprehension of pleasing God by doing things which he never commanded, or forbearing those which he hath no where Forbidden. And this was the *μεγαλην ἁμαρτιαν*, the great and leading Error of the Pharisees. They added to the written Word of God, and made more Duties and sins than ever the Law had made. Their Traditions, which had nothing to recommend them but the Custom of their Fathers, they esteemed equal at least to the Divine Commandments; Nay our Saviour expressly tells us, *They made the Commandments of God of no effect by their Traditions*; as if they thought to please him better in their own way than in His: And reckon'd

Reckon'd they advanc'd themselves above others, by what they did over and above their Duty, as much in his as they did in their own Opinion. And hence Conformity to their Traditional Rites, was their measure of Improvement and Perfection in Religion, as appears by St. Pauls Character of himself, *Gal. 1. 14. I profited in the Jews Religion above many of my Equals in my own Nation, being more exceedingly Zealous of the Tradition of my Fathers.* Which words, if we observe their connexion with those immediately before them, seem to come in as the Reason, why *beyond measure* (as he there tells us) *he Persecuted the Church of God and wasted it; i. e.* His mighty Zeal for the Unscriptural Doctrines of the Pharisees, was the true ground of his Bitter and furious Zeal against the Professors of the True Religion. And this is the rather to be noted, because it shews us the Spirit and Genius of that Sect, that had the chief hand in bringing our Saviour to his Cross, and first conspired the ruine of Christianity.

From the Words thus explained, the matter I would crave leave to Propose to your serious considerations is this. That the Consciences of Men may be so far

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mis-guided

misguided by Erroneous Principles, and an Affectation of things in which Religion does not consist, as to encourage them to the fiercest opposition, to the express Revelations of God, and the truths of Jesus. Or more briefly thus: That Christianity is liable to the sharpest Opposition from Men, under the highest Pretence of Zeal and Conscience towards God and Religion.

In speaking to this Subject my Design is,

1. To confirm the truth of this Observation.

2. To shew whence it is that Men are liable to be thus Misguided by Erroneous Principles, and transported with this Extravagant and Destructive Zeal.

3. To make some Inferences that may be Useful to our selves.

1. For the confirmation of this Truth: That the Consciences of Men may be thus Misguided, and their Spirits Inflamed by Erroneous Principles against the Truth, may appear from our Saviours Character of his, and his Churches Enemies, and from many plain and undeniable Instances Parallel to this of the Confessor in the Text.

1. From

I. From our Saviours Character of His and his Churches Enemies. Our Blessed Lord, fore-seeing what a zealous Opposition his Church and Doctrine would assuredly meet withal after his decease, takes occasion a little before his Passion to fore-warn his Disciples of it. He had often told them in the general, *That they must look for Trouble and Persecution from Men.* Now the time of Tryal drawing on, to prevent the damp of a Surprisal, he Describes the temper and Spirit of their Enemies, and shews them what hard measure they and their Followers must expect from them: *They shall put you out of the Synagogues, (i. e. excommunicate and curse you for Hereticks) yea the time cometh, That whosoever Killeth you will think that he doth God service,* John 16. 2. It seems to kill a Disciple for his Religion, was in the judgment of these Men, like the Worshiping of God by Sacrifice. *They shall think by it (saith our Saviour) ναρκείαν προσφέρειν τῷ Θεῷ, to perform a grateful Service or Sacrifice to God:* As if they knew no better way of pleasing him, than by taking a Lamb out of his own Flock, and making it an Oblation to him. Now

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this

this is certainly a very strange way of serving God, and such as men would never have thought of, if they had not Deify'd something more than him, and changed the Glory of the Holy and Merciful God into a direful Image of their own Temper and Complexion, whom they Worship instead of him. And as I doubt not but the Jews were primarily intended in this Prophecy, so to the Infinite Scandal of Christianity, there is unanswerable Reason to think that many that shelter themselves under the Sacred Profession of it, are very deeply concerned in it; sure I am, that all the Marks of this Prophecy, the same Religious zeal, express'd by the same rage, rancour, and cruelty, are very fresh and easie to be seen upon them.

2. By many plain and Undeniable Instances Parallel to that we meet with in the Text. The Apostles Confession was indeed a singular thing, But for the Crimes which he taxeth himself with, he might as justly have charged his Nation with them, the main Body of the Jewish Church, especially the governing part of it, being strangely Leavened with this Sowre and Destruc-

tive

tive zeal. *They had a zeal for God (as St. Paul himself Testifies of them) but not according to knowledge*; for they knew not his Immence Goodness and Benignity to Mankind, nor his only begotten Son, when he was amongst them. They had a zeal for the Law, but so they presumed to call what ever they had made Law by their Glosses and Traditions; and directed it against those that had a zeal against them. And a very fierce and fatal zeal it was; A zeal that Crucified the Lord of Life: That threw the Apostles into Prisons, That cleared the Synagogues of them and their Disciples: That Crampt and Loaded them with Chains and Fetters, and for a *good work* gave forty Stripes save one. A zeal that suborned Witnesses, and breathed out Threatnings and Raughter against Men of whom the World was not worthy; a zeal that lifted Men into Conspiracies, and bound them under an Oath to Kill an Innocent Person. An outrageous zeal it was, that made Men exceedingly Mad, as one that had too much experience of it, tells us (*v. 11th. of this Chapter*) so mad, as to think they ought to do many things contrary to the clearest Revelations of God and the Name of Jesus. D 3 Nor

Of the Danger of a

Nor is this kind of Zeal Peculiar to the temper of the Jewish Nation. There are those in the World, that would be thought the only Good Christians, who roundly Excommunicate all other Churches for not complying with their Dictates as essential to Christianity, which the Scripturs and the next Ancient and venerable Writings do assure us are not. There are those that call us Hereticks, (and have often proved us so, as clearly as Fire and Faggot can do it) because we are so strait-faced as to Believe but just so many Truths and Articles of Faith, as were at first delivered to the Saints: And are so Nice and Humorous as not to Believe the flattest contradictions to them. There is a Church that for several Ages, and in several Councils, hath Decreed the Extirpation of Hereticks (i. e. the most Orthodox Christians) by Fire and Sword, and fairly Recommended it as an Eminent Test of Catholick Zeal. Others (at least) there have been, who with mighty Confidence pretended to secret motions and Immediate Warrants from Heaven, to Worry and Destroy all that should withstand them and their *Doctrin*.

I might tire you with instances of
both

both kinds, and make it appear that the Zeal of Christians against One another hath in point of Fierceness and Cruelty, far exceeded the Pattern in the Text.

For the Proof of this, I might but desire you to take a short Review of the Ruines which Romish Zeal hath made in Protestant Countries, from our own to the very borders of the Ottoman Empire. To keep nearest home, I might appeal to the Holy League of France for the Utter Extirpation of the Reform'd Religion: And to the Barbarous Usage of more than many Thousand Christians in the United Provinces, I mean, before the Quarrel began with the Civil Government. I might refer you to Inquisitions, Invasions and Massacres; to the Burning Zeal of the *Marian* days, and the Powder Conspiracy here in *England*, that Master-piece of Inhumanity, design'd, no doubt, to make amends for the long Peace and Tranquility we enjoyed under the Pious and gentle Reign of our Immortal Virgin Queen. After these, it were cold and endless to mention all the Impious and Unnatural Artifices of the Agents of *Rome* against the Lives of our Princes, the felicity of our Government,

Grot. Annal. lib. 1.

Foulis Hist. of Romish Treasons and Usurp.

and the Vitals of our Religion. One thing in the general you may observe, that when ever the Church of Rome hath lost any thing by dint of Argument, she hath presently betaken her self to sharper and deadlier Weapons for the Recovery of it. And methinks it is the least of Wonders, that a Church Pamper'd with Power and Wealth and Honours, that thinks her self fit to give Law to the whole Christian World, and that it is her Unquestionable Right and Duty by all possible means to do it, should not wave her Principles, and content her self to admonish and Weep over Obstinate Hereticks, (as our Blessed Lord did over *Jerusalem*), when her designs call for Blood and Cruelty, and 'tis apparent that Men will not be made Obedient without them. On the other hand, there has been another sort of men that under pretence of Refining the Reformation, have shamefully violated the Pure and Undeiled Religion that came from Heaven. And for this, I might refer you to the Wicked Outrages of the *Anabaptists* at *Munster*, and the Terrible Battles which have been fought for little Phansies, and affected singularities in Religion.

Religion. I might call to your Remembrance the many Insurrections, and (what I even Tremble to speak of) the horrid Murther of the late Arch-Bishop in *Scotland*. I might desire you to reflect upon the fierce and bloody Attempts, which in our Memory and Nation have been managed upon the *fifth Monarchy Principles*. In a word, I might carry you to the Tombs of Kings, Nobles, and Prelates, of worthy Patriots and Ministers of Justice, of Preachers and Ambassadors of Peace, who by hands lifted up to Heaven, have been Offered (to use the Apostles Phrase) upon the Sacrifice and Service of your Faith, which some call *Hereſie*, and according to which we now Worship the God of our Fathers.

Now to apply these Allusions to the purpose of the Text, I shall only observe to you, that the chief Actors and Parties in them have at one time or other confessed, that they verily thought they were engaged in a good Cause; many Apologies have been made, and many Volumes have been written for them; Yea, many have sealed it with their Blood, and pronounc'd it with their
last

last breath, that the things they did, and Dyed for, as ill as they look'd towards the World, were done out of Zeal to God and Religion; that is, they *thought* they ought to have done them, as contrary and Dishonourable as they really were, to the Name of *Jesus*.

I come now in the second place,
2. To shew whence it is that Men are liable to be thus Misguided by Erroneous Principles, and Transported with this Extravagant and destructive Zeal. I confess, 'tis very natural to men to be warm and zealous for their own Doctrines and Sentiments, in so much that they that have the Truth on their side, have not always the Charity and Good-Nature that should attend it. But that this Inclination should so mightily raise the Spleen, and fire the Spirits of Men: That it should grow so violent, Quarrellsome, and Impetuous, as to sever the Restraint of Laws both Divine and Humane, and break down all the Fences of Government, to set up the Kingdom of Christ, *which is not of this World*; That the Disciples of so meek a Master as our Saviour was, and the Professors of so Charitable and obliging, so Holy

Holy and Healing an Institution as Christianity is, should think themselves Bound to promote every Crude Opinion with the Sword, Nay, that inspired and (as they call themselves) *Infalible* Men, should be so much out of the way, so exceedingly fierce, and angry with all that are not of their Minds, as to devote them to Present and Eternal Ruine: These things are so extreemly full of Scandal and Contradiction, that without a Demonstration of the Truth, it were scarce Charity to believe the possibility of them. But let us do that Right to Christianity and our selves, as to see where the fault lyes, and what it is that under the pretence of Conscience, has wrought so much Misery and Confusion in the Christian World.

To assign all the causes of these Evils, would require more Time and Patience than the present occasion will allow. I shall therefore confine my self to such as I think have the greatest Interest in them, and are best able to answer for them.

I. The first is Bad Education: which has a strange Influence upon the Spirits and Persuasions of Men, and is able to change

change the sweetest natural Dispositions into the Bitterest and fiercest Tempers. The great Spring and Mover of Humane Actions in the Judgment of the Mind, and therefore the first Information of the Judgment, which is the Business of Education, must have a mighty stroke in the Conduct of the Life of Man; and the rather because the Impressions we receive of things, while our Minds are free from all suspicion and Prejudice, are commonly the Deepest most lasting and indelible. And hence it is, that Men are generally very apt to stick to their first Principles, be they true or false, and for want of due enquiry how they came by them, to take them for Divine Impressions and Eternal Truths. And thus an Erroneous Conscience Usurps the Authority of a Guide, the ordinary effect of which, is a zealous Opposition against all that stand in its way, or presume to Check and disturb the Dictates of it. For what ever ought to be, it is plain that Mens present Thoughts and Principles are and will be the Rule of their Actions; and that the worse any Principles are, and the Earlier they are Instilled into them, under

under the Notion of Divine Truths, the more strongly they Impregnate their Minds, and excite them to pursue the Tendencies of them. And therefore we need not much wonder at those, who are bred up in a Religion contrary to the Truth, as it is in Jesus, and to his Commandments of Love, Peace and Unity: Who are taught from their Cradles to call us Hereticks, and to speak the bitterest things against us, to Break their Faith with us, and to mark us out for Destruction, if in process of time they grow expert in all the Arts of Confusion, and with undaunted Courage Undertake the Boldest Crimes, which their Party and Principles do Countenance the Practice of.

'Tis true, the Prejudices of Education are not invincible, if Men would take a right course to overcome them: But this is a rare case, and there are but few, in Comparison of those that choose to enjoy their Errors, that are willing to make a Tryal of it. And indeed, when our green and tender Minds are once warped by false and Pernicious Principles, it is no easy matter to bring them straight, and to put them into a right Posture again.

gain. It requires a great deal of Consideration and Impartial inquiry into the Reason and bottom of things, which some Men want abilities of mind, others Leisure, Humility, Patience, and Integrity to carry them through: And the want of any of these is enough to answer for their obstinate persisting in their First Errours, and unreasonable Opposition to the Truth.

1 Pet. I.
18.

2. Affected Ignorance of the Truth, naturally hardens Men in their Evil Principles, and disposes them to approve of any Rugged and violent Course to keep up the Reputation of them. The Jews in our Saviour's time had the greatest Advantages that ever Men enjoyed of being delivered from the Chains and Fetters of an ill Education, or (as St. Peter calls it) *From their vain Conversation received by Tradition from their Fathers.* They had the Brightest Revelations of the Divine Nature and Will that ever came from Heaven: And those delivered to them by their own *Messiah*, whom they had long expected: In whom all the Promises concerning that Infinite Blessing to Mankind were exactly fulfilled. Who wrought the greatest and most

most Astonishing Miracles that ever the World beheld: Who gave them a Perfect Comment on the Law, which had been miserably Corrupted by the Glosses of their Scribes and Doctors, and layed open their Hypocrisies to themselves and all the People; and yet so Blind and Sottish were they, as to reject all his Admonitions with Spight and Scorn, to *Love Darknes rather than Light*, to Admire their Deluders, and to Crucify their Guide to Eternal Bliss and Happiness. Our Saviour himself Testifies of them in the height of their Rage and Malice against him, *that they knew not what they did.* They had been Taught their *Messiah* should be a Glorious King and Conquerour, and such an One they must have or none. They had been long wonted to a Pompous and Ceremonious service: And therefore could not bear the thoughts of having the Stately *Fabrick* of their Religion, Erected by God himself, and supported by *Moses* and the Prophets, taken down by the *Carpenters Son*, as they stiled our Lord. These were the Fatal Chains that held them fast in that Dungeon of Darknes and Ignorance, which Paradise it self could not Tempt them

Luke 23.

34

them, nor the Son of God could not re-
deem them from.

And is not the same wilfull and Affected Ignorance still to be found amongst the Adversaries of our Religion? Some think there ought to be an Infallible and Universal Head of the Church on Earth, and such an one they will have what ever it costs them. Others that are strongly perswaded of Christs Personal Reign upon Earth, think they ought to Fight for King Jesus against all Opposers. And why is Ignorance so much Cherish'd and Applauded in the Church of Rome, but that it gives the Guides of that Church a mighty advantage to Mis-lead the People, and Embolden them to act any illthing they are pleased to Impose upon them? And this is the very use they make of it; they Teach them to call Evil Good, and Good Evil: to Invert the Nature of things, and to Fix the Crossed Names they can devise upon them, and then Prosecute them directly contrary to their intrinsick merit: Just as the Heathens Cloath'd the Christians in Beasts Skins, and then exposed them to be Worried by Wild Beasts to Death. They first teach them to call our Religion

on

on Heresie, which naturally creates an Implacable Hatred of it: And having gone thus far, they easily perswade them they cannot be too Zealous to suppress it; the next step to which Persuasion is to think any thing to be lawful that will do it, or if that will not do, it shall be Meritorious: And then to destroy Hereticks, follows of course to be a Glorious Work; But surely St. Paul did not think so, when he confest the contrariety of it to the Name of Jesus. Nor did our Saviour think so, when he reprov'd the Rash and Destructive zeal of his Disciples, who would have consumed the Samaritans by Fire from Heaven, telling them, *that they knew not what manner of Spirits they were of.* And after this, ^{Luke 9. 55.} should I presume to say, that the Controversies between us and the Church of Rome, have been managed with invincible strength and demonstration of the Truth on our side: Or should I say, that no cause since the sealing of the Scriptures (unless that of our common Christianity) was ever better Defended than our departure from that Church, I should not be ashamed of this confidence of boasting.

1 Tim. 6.
5.

3. Secular Interests have great Power to distort the Judgments of men, and to inflame their Passions against those that differ from them in matters of Religion. What ever it is they place their chief satisfaction in, whether they are bound for the Port of Gain, or Honour or Liberty, we commonly find they make all the Sail that ever they can to come speedily to it. If the way to attain their ends be to appear stoutly for this, or that Party or Persuasion, they will readily do it, and serve the cause to the Utmost, if they happen to thrive by it. Men of corrupt Minds and destitute of the Truth, do not use to be Bashful in asserting their Principles when they find their Interests in them. But supposing Gain to be Godliness (as the Apostle observes of them) are generally very forward to shew their good Affection to it, and like *Demetrius*, to put the World into an uproar, out of zeal to the Magnificence of their Great *Diana*, and their Profits from her Shrines and Altars. Conscience is true, at the first, has the least share in the Actions of these Men, whose Interests choose their Principle for them. But what they strongly Affect, and de-

fire

fire should be true, in time they strongly believe; and having willfully Rejected the Truth, are given up by the Just Judgment of God to their own Delusions, to Believe and defend the Lye.

4. Some Principles are so bad in themselves, as to inspire men with a furious and Unchristian Zeal, and without the help of Worldly Interest to instigate and push them on to violent and Unnatural Actions. Such are those which Warrant the Killing of men for Christs sake, and the Gospels, and promise them Heaven for the vilest Practices in the World. For assassinating their Natural Prince, Betraying their Country, and putting it under a Foreign and insupportable Yoke. Such are all those that make Unlawful and indifferent things absolutely Necessary to Salvation, and encourage Men to think the better of themselves for their Zeal against such as pretend to nothing but the plain Rules of Christianity, and a Decent Way of serving of God in Spirit and in Truth. These Principles do naturally produce an Envious and Ill-na-

tur'd Zeal: 'Tis the property of those that are under the Power and Guidance of them, to allow no Man a Name for Religion but themselves, to be angry with every one that do's not Espouse their Follies, to Glory in their Marks of Distinction, and take themselves to be the Holier and better men for Differing from all Christians upon Earth.

And this is too often the effect of that odd and Peevish Principle, that Innocent and indifferent things cease to be Lawful when they are once Commanded. No Man knows the malignity of such an Error as this, should it once get the Ascendant (which is the true Aim and Tendency of it) over that Authority which God hath placed in the Rulers of his Church. Do we not already find the Influence of it upon some of the Straitest Sect of our Religion, who yet have reserved themselves a sufficient Latitude in Scorning and Deriding their Brethren, and are extreamly lavish in their Censures of Persons of the highest Character and Reverence in the Church of God? Nay, many there are that prize

prize and commend themselves upon these very Accounts, and look upon it as a mark of Sanctity, to Break and blemish the Communion of that Church, which they pretend no other Quarrel with, than only for interposing her Authority in some indifferent things, *i. e.* making use of the Power which Christ himself hath given to every Church, for the benefit and Edification of it. And what is this but to Consecrate a Schism into a state of Perfection, and to do that for Religions sake, which directly tends to the undoing and subversion of it?

5. *Enthusiasm*, or a false pretence to Divine Inspiration, is a Fatal cause of this Extravagant Zeal. When men have the Confidence to ascribe their Errors to the immediate Dictates of the Spirit: When they take themselves to be the peculiar Favourites of God, in whose Breasts he hath lodg'd his choicest Secrets, whom he hath chosen and authorized to bring his most glorious Designs to pass, 'tis not to be expected they should long content themselves with the Pleasure of these Delu-

sions. That Evil Spirit, that hath blinded their Eyes, and taught them to Believe the Holy Ghost, has a farther Design upon them: And as the Philistines dealt with *Sampson*, when they had put out his Eyes, will surely Employ them in his Drudgeries, and put them upon the most destructive Attempts. 'Tis hardly to be imagined what desperate Projects men will freely contribute their Service to, when they are once possessed with a Spirit of Delusion, and struck Blind with an Opinion, that whatever they strongly Fancy is Infallibly so: That 'tis impossible for them to Err, having Private Instructions from God himself, hitherto hid from Ages and Generations, to Advance the Kingdom of Christ, and exalt it to a more glorious Height. To which purpose an Eminent Divine of this Church, who had a peculiar Sagacity in Tracing and detecting the Errours of his time) hath left us this memorable passage: * *When Men are once Erroneously persuaded, that 'tis the Will of God to have those things done which they Fancy, then Opinions are as Thorns in their sides, never suffering them to take rest till they have brought their Speculations in-*

* *Mr. Hooker*
Pref. to
Eccel. Pol.

to Practice: The Impediments of which Practice their restless desire and study to remove, leadeth them every Day into more dangerous Opinions, sometimes quite and clean contrary to their first pretended meanings: So that what will grow out of such Errors, as go mask'd under the Cloak of Divine Authority, impossible it is that ever the Wit of Man should imagine, till time has brought forth the Fruits of them.

I Proceed now, in the third and last place,

3. To make some Inferences briefly from this Discourse: From whence it will follow,

1. That we have no Reason, when we see the Effects of this Destructive and Unchristian Zeal, to be stagger'd in our Religion, or to suspect our Faith. That the best Religion should meet with the sharpest Opposition from Men, that the worst Actions should pretend to serve it, and receive Authority and Encouragement from it, that Men of Learning and Knowledge, and of High and Extraordinary Zeal should Combine against it, are no new things in the World. The Church from her Infancy has been acquainted with them, and our Saviour and his Apostles have expressly foretold them,

on purpose that we should not be Offended when we see and feel them.

2. Hence we learn, that an Erroneous Conscience is a very unsafe and dangerous Guide. And it must needs be so, because it is supposed to Dictate the mind of God, and by his Authority to guide our Practice. And accordingly the greatest Troubles and Persecutions which have befallen the Church, are manifestly Owing to the Delusions which have past under the Name of Conscience in several Ages; which should mightily awaken us to look well to our Principles, and to keep our Minds Pure and untainted with Errour. *If the Light (saith* Mar. 6. 23. *Christ) that is in thee be Darkness, how great is that Darkness?* A little speck in the Eye, fed by an Invincible Humour, often Destroys the most Useful and Noble Sense: 'Tis sad to observe from what small beginnings the greatest Errours both in Judgment and Practice have in a short time spread and diffused themselves to the infinite Prejudice of Christianity, and the unspeakable Trouble and dishonour of the Church. To give you one Remarkable Instance of this: In the beginning of the Reformation in Germany.

They, who first scrupled only the Doctrine of Infant Baptism, by degrees so Intangled themselves in New and greater Errours, that in a few Years they grew the highest *Enthusiasts*, vented the Rankest Blasphemies, and the most Fulsome Opinions: And after the fairest shew of sanctity and self-denial, threw off all Humanity, Indulging themselves in the most Beastial and Impudent vices; *in fine*, They Renounc't all Allegiance to their Lawful Superiours set up a Puppet King of their own, Dignified him with the Title of Universal *Monarch*, and to Compleat the Tragedy, Baptiz'd one another with their own Blood.

3. That the greatest Zeal is no Evidence of the goodness of any Cause or Principles. While some contend as earnestly against, as others do for the Truth, their Zeal can Determine nothing on either side. 'Tis the goodness of Principles, and the Merit of a Cause, that can only Justify our Zeal for them: If they be wanting, Zeal is no better than Rage and Frenzy. Therefore, saith the Apostle, Gal. 4. 18. *It is Good to be Zealously affected always in a good thing*; which Implies, that when our Zeal is not thus Qualified, it is good
for

for nothing : Or if it rises above the Goodness of its Object, it so far overshoots it self, and Degenerates into Vice and Folly. And this is the Fault of those that lay the Weight of Religion upon slender things ; that can find nothing to spend their Zeal upon, but an Innocent Phrase or Ceremony, that Displease Communion with a Church that does not hit their Phancy in every Punctilio, and seem (almost) contented the *Protestant* Religion should sink rather than the best support of it should stand, I mean, the Union of *Protestants* in our Establish'd National Religion. These are Humours that Charity it self can hardly Excuse in them, or look upon as any other than the excesses of a mistaken and Intemperate Zeal. In short, Zeal is either the best Friend, or the keenest Enemy to Religion, for which reason we ought to look narrowly to the Grounds and Tendencies of it.

4. We see what reason we have to be aware of those Persons, who Teach and Promote such Principles as are contrary to the True Spirit and Interest of Christianity. I know not what can be said worse of any Religion, than that it inspires

inspires Men with Rage and Cruelty, quenches the Spirit of Love and Meekness, and Represents God as the Author of Confusion, a Humorous and Discontented Being, that is never Pleased long with his own Prescriptions, and therefore must be sooth'd and flatter'd with something that is New and Fanciful, that looks like an Excess or Transport of Devotion, that is Owing to the Good-Will, or Ill-Nature of Men; such Religion as this can never reconcile it self to the Doctrine of Christianity, but will be supplanting it where-ever it comes: And the Zeal it infuses into Men, will (if not effectually restrained) Act over all these Dismal Tragedies again, of which the Christian Church has been almost the Constant Scene ever since the Foundation of it. We should therefore be jealous of it in all shapes: Whether it Pleads for Unity, as the Church of *Rome* do's, who takes her self to be the Only Church, and therefore Reprobates all that will not be United to her: Or whether it declares for Free-Grace, *i. e.* a Gospel without a Sanction, as the *German Anabaptists* and *Ranters* did, who turn'd the Grace of God into Lasciviousness, and

and liv'd as if it taught them to deny themselves no Ungodliness or Worldly Lusts; whether it pretends to Visions and Revelations of the Lord, contrary to the Doctrines Received and delivered by his Apostles from him: Or whether it sets up for Purity of Worship, in mistaken or doubtful Instances, against the Peace of the Church, and contrary to the Wisdom that is from above, which is *first Pure, Jam. 3. 17. then Peaceable, Gentle, and Easy to be intreated*: Not Peevish or implacable, not apt to Quarrel with Shadows, and much less to put three Kingdoms into a Flame for the sake of three harmless Ceremonies.

5. Lastly, Since Christianity is liable to, and has endured so much Opposition from Men, we should learn to adore Gods Infinite Wisdom and Goodness in Preserving his Truth, and Protecting his Church, against the Zealous Endeavours of their Enemies to stifle and destroy them. And certainly We of this Nation have seen as extraordinary Evidences of this kind, as ever any Christian Nation did. Our deliverances have had so many visible marks

marks of a Divine and Peculiar Providence upon them, that one would think they should at once clear the Nation of all Atheistical Dotage. Open the Eyes of its Divided Inhabitants, and Discourage its most zealous Adversaries from Daring any longer that All-seeing Eye that hath so often discovered, from struggling any more with that Omnipotent hand, that hath so seasonably baffled their Closer and most perfidious Designs and Practices. And doubtless were we as sensible as we ought to be, of God's singular goodness towards us, in casting us into the Bosom of a Church, where we have all advantages for Eternal Salvation, and in lengthening out our Peace and Tranquility in despite of our Enemies, we should think it our Interest to leave our selves still in his hands. I do not mean, by sitting still and neglecting our Guards, but by a patient continuance in Well-doing, by attempting nothing that is Unworthy of our excellent Religion: By a clear and genuine Zeal for the Honour of God our Saviour; by our Unfeigned thankfulness to him for his Wonderful

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ful Mercies, by confiding in his Goodness and Protection; by the Fervency of our Prayers; and Intercessions with him, and by mutual Exchanges of kindness and condescension to one another, in any thing that may truly promote our Common Interest: In a word, by adhering to the Old Principles of Christianity, and avoiding the two dangerous Rocks of Superstition and Enthusiasm, and what ever else is contrary to the Name of Jesus.

Grant, O Lord, we beseech thee, that the course of this World may be so Peaceably Ordered by thy Governance, that thy Church may joyfully serve thee in all Godly quietness, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

SERMON

Sermon III.

Of the Different Dispensations of
Grace, and of Impenitency un-
der the best means of Salva-
tion.

Matthew 11. 21, 22.

*Wo unto thee Chorazin, Wo unto thee
Bethsaida, For if the Mighty Works
which were done in you, had been done
in Tyre and Sidon, they would have
Repented long ago in Sack-cloth and
Ashes.*

*But I say unto you, it shall be more tole-
rable for Tyre and Sidon in the Day
of Judgment, than for you.*

Chorazin and Bethsaida, were Cities
of Galilee, situate on the Sea-
Shore, not very far from the Coasts
of

of *Tyre* and *Sidon*. They profess the Jewish Religion, and had the Privilege of hearing our Saviours Doctrine, and beholding his Miracles. But these Advantages they were so little the better for, that He upbraided them for their Unparallel'd Infidelity and hardness of Heart, representing them as more obstinate than the very Heathens about them: More averse to their own Happiness than their Neighbours of *Tyre* and *Sidon*, who had nothing but the weak Light of Nature to guide them to it. These Gentiles had no Prophets or Scriptures to instruct them, no Miracles to open their Eyes, no promises of Pardon or Eternal Life to encourage their Repentance: And yet our Saviour tells us, they were in a better disposition to receive the Gospel, and would much sooner have repented at the sight of his mighty Works, than the *Galileans* that had all the proper means to dispose and Encline them to it. And this was the great aggravation of the sin of these impenitent Jews, and the ground of the Threatning here De-

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Dispensations of Grace.

nounc't against them: *Wo unto thee Chorazin, Wo unto thee Bethsaida, for if the mighty Works which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they had Repented, &c.*

Tho' there seems to be no great Difficulty in the meaning of these Words, yet (what ever be the Reason of it) there is a great Dispute amongst Interpreters about it: *viz*, Whether our Saviour means, that the effect of his Miracles upon *Tyre* and *Sidon* would have been the Real Conversion of those Cities; or whether by their Repenting in *Sackloth* and *Asbes*, we are to understand no more than a meer External or Counterfeit Repentance. That the former of these is in several respects the more Natural Sense, as will sufficiently appear, if we Consider,

I. The Scope and Tenour of our Saviour's Discourse in this place. In the Verse before the Text the *Evangelist* tells us, that he then began to Upbraid the Cities where most of his

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mighty Works were done, ^{ὅτι ὅ μὲν}
^{ῥά σμεν.} *Because they Repented not, i. e.*
Truly and Heartily: As is clear by
the Current Usage of the Original
Word in Scripture, and the most pro-
per and Genuine Importance of it.
Besides, this was the only Repen-
tance which Christ came to Convince
the World of the absolute necessity
of, and this his Doctrine and Mira-
cles were apt to produce in all that
rightly weighed and observed them,
and therefore if Christ Reproved the
Jews for want of any Repentance, it
must be for want of this. And
from hence it follows, that when
He Upbraids them with the Repen-
tance of *Tyre* and *Sidon* in *Sack-*
cloth and *Asbes*; his meaning must be,
that theirs would have proved a True,
Solemn, and Unfeigned Repentance.
For, where is otherwise the Up-
braiding, which the *Evangelist* speaks
of? If the *Tyrians* had continued
Impenitent under the Preaching of
the Gospel, and in View of the mighty
Works of our Saviour, they would
have done just as the *Jews* did; and
if

Dispensations of Grace.

if they had made a shew of Repenting, when they did not: Put *Sackcloth* upon their *Loins*, and *Asbes* upon their *Heads*, when their Hearts were as hard, and their Lusts were as Rampant as ever, we may be sure Christ would never have call'd this Repentance, which is all over *Hypocrisie*. Nor could this be any Reproach to the *Jews*, to hear that other Nations, had they been in their Circumstances, would have proved as Wicked or worse than they. No man thinks it any shame to him to be told, that others are every whit as Bad and Vicious as Himself: This is not to Aggravate and Upbraid, but rather to stroak and Extenuate his Crimes, by shewing the Commonness of them, and the great Aptitude of Humane Nature to fall into them. Briefly, our Saviour's saying to the Men of *Galilee*, That it would be more Tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the Day of Judgment than for them, plainly Refers to the good disposition

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of those Cities to Repent of their Lewdness and Idolatry, and Embrace the Gospel. To which may be added.

2. That the Conversion of these very Nations began suddenly after the Death of our Saviour, as appears by the Visits, St. Paul made to the Disciples of Tyre and Sidon. Shall we question now, whether these were true Penitents and Disciples or not? If not, why should we think that Christ's own Preaching and Miracles might not have wrought the same Blessed effects upon them, which his *Apostles* did? Or what Reason have we to doubt the Truth of their Repentance at any time, when the Gospel had been tender'd with the same advantage to them? Especially, since Christ himself tells us, that they would have Repented long ago in *Sackcloth* and *Asbes*: Than which it is not easy to find a more Proper Expression, to signify at once a very Solemn and Serious Repentance.
- From

Acts 21.
3, 4, 5.
27. 3

Best Means of Salvation.

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From the words thus explained, we may observe,

1st. *Obfer.* That God is pleased to afford better means of Grace and Salvation to some Persons and Nations, than to others.

2d. *Obfer.* That the same Means, which are unprofitable to some Men, would surely have been effectual to the Reformation of others, if they had enjoyed them.

3d. *Obfer.* That the Final Condition of those that Reject the Gospel, and continue Impenitent under the ministration of it, will be more grievous and intolerable than theirs, that were never called to Repentance by it.

I begin with the first of these, *viz.*

1. That God is pleased to afford better Means of Grace and Salvation to some Persons and Nations than to others.

In speaking to this Truth, I shall

1. Clear it by some Undeniable Instances: And,

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2. Endeavour to vindicate the Equity of Divine Providence in reference to this Particular Dispensation of it.

1. For the First, That God affords better Means of Grace and Salvation to some Persons and Nations than to others, is clear to all that understand any thing of the state of Religion in the World. When God began to distinguish his own People from the rest of Mankind, he gave them better Means to improve and secure his Favour than the rest enjoyed. He did not leave them merely to the guidance of Natural Light, as he left the greatest part of Mankind, but revealed himself to them by the ministry of Angels and Prophets, by Visions and Voices from Heaven. He wrote down the Great Rules of their Obedience to him with his own Hand, and encouraged them to the practice of them by special and ample Promises. When God chose the Posterity of *Abraham* at first for his Peculiar People, he made an Express Covenant with him to distinguish his Seed by Spiritual Blessings from all the Kindreds of the Earth.

While

Best Means of Salvation.

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While all the World about him lived in Ignorance and Idolatry, worshipping the Gods which their own Fears and Phancies had made, *Abraham* had the Priviledge to Converse with God, and to behold *the day of Christ afar off.* Gen. 18. He was taught the way of the Lord, 19. and taught his Children to walk in the same Paths, to *do Justice and Judgment*, that God *might bring upon Abraham the great things* which he had spoken of him. And accordingly he did so: He gave him a numerous Offspring, trained up in the Knowledge and Fear of the Only True God, instructed in all the minute instances of Obedience to him, and preserved by Wonderful Providences against all the Malice and Fury of all the Fierce and Mighty Nations that were round about them. The Jews, in comparison of other Nations, were the very Darlings of Providence; they lived in a Land of Light, when Darkness covered the Face of the whole Earth: A Land whose least happiness was, that it flowed with all kinds of Temporal Blessings, there being no Nation (as *Moses* told them, when 8. *Deut. 4. 7,*

they were going to inhabit) that had God so nigh unto them in all that they called upon him for ; or that had Statutes and Judgments so Righteous as all the Laws which he set before them for a Lamp to their Feet, and a Light unto their Paths ; and which, if they carefully followed them, would assuredly bring them to the Cœlestial Canaan. To them (saith St. Paul, speaking of God's Distinguishing Grace and Goodness to the Jews) *were committed*

Rom. 3. 2. the Oracles of God ; to them pertained
Rom. 9. 4. the Adoption, and the Glory (or Divine Presence) and the Covenants, and the giving of the Law, and the service of God, and the Promises.

And as the Jews, of all Nations in the World, stood the fairest for Eternal Life. So those of them that lived in our Saviours time, had Fairer Opportunities of being Happy, than all that lived before them in expectation of his Coming ; And of all the Jews of that Age, the Inhabitants of the Great Cities of Galilee, such as *Corazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum*, living in the same Country and Neighbourhood that our Saviour did, had the greatest advantages

tages for the knowledge of the True God, and the way to Eternal Bliss and Happiness. They did not only hear the Fame of his Miracles, and the Echo of his Doctrine from distant Places, but they Saw and Heard them in the most Affecting and Immediate Manner; they beheld the Son of God clothed with their own Nature, they heard him Preaching in their Streets, many of them that never saw or heard any thing in their lives before him. They heard his Divine Sayings, even the Words of Eternal Life from him; they Feasted on his Miracles, were Fed, Healed and Inlightned by them, and felt the Power of his Divinity in their Rescue from the Tyranny of Evil Spirits. Thus Salvation came home to the Jews, threw it self as it were into their Arms, and without waiting for their Entreaties, urged and obtruded it self upon them. And Mt. 12. 16, 17. blessed are the Eyes which see the things which they saw, and the Ears which hear the words that they heard. It being as easie for such persons to enter into Life, as it is to believe their own Eyes and Ears, and to follow the

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Instructions they received from them So that the Jews of our Saviours time, and especially those of his own Province and Acquaintance, had the Best Means of Salvation of any People upon Earth: And this was plainly the meaning of that Saying of his to the Woman of *Samaria* [John 4.22.] that *Salvation is of the Jews.*

'Tis true, after the Ascension of our Lord, and the Preaching of the Gospel to the Gentile World, all those Nations to which the Gospel came, stood upon the same Level with the Jews; I mean, had as Great Reason to believe the Gospel, and embrace the tenders of it, as the Jews themselves had, those only excepted that saw our Saviour when he was risen from the Dead. But some Nations have never yet received the Gospel, and Myriads there are of People in the World, that never so much as heard of the Name of Jesus, or the Holy Bible. Others, that once embraced the Gospel, and made a Considerable Figure in the Christian Church, have by departing from the Faith, and corrupting themselves with Lewd Errors

rours and Practices, lost all the Glorious Priviledges that were conferred upon them. Of this number were the seven Famous Churches of *Asia*, mentioned in the *Revelations*, from whom Christ has recalled his Angels, and fercht away his Golden Candlesticks, and left them in a Dark Night of Ignorance and Superstition. And this shews that the Best Means of Grace and Salvation are not entailed upon particular Nations: And that the Synagogue of Satan may stand upon the Ruines of those which were once the most Orthodox and Flourishing Churches.

In short, if we take a view of the state of Religion in the Christian World at this day, nothing is more evident than the Vast Difference there is in the Administration of the Word and Sacraments (which are the Principal Means of Grace) in several Churches of the Greatest Name, and the Highest Pretence to Purity of Faith and Worship: And that there is One above all the Rest, where the Scriptures, the Great Instrument of our Salvation, are wrested out of the Hands of the Peo-

ple, lest they should discern the wrong that is done them in denying them the *Key of Knowledge*, and with their own Eyes see the things which belong to their Eternal Peace.

Mat. 25.
14, 15. &c.

Now by all these Instances it is evident, that there is a great Inequality in the Disposal of the Means of Grace, and that God does not afford them to all Men, or in all Ages, alike: But to some he gives more, and to others less, according to his Sovereign Will and Pleasure. And this our Saviour hath very plainly represented to us in the Parable of the Talents, which the Lord that was Travelling into a far Country distributed to his Servants: To one he gave five, to another two, and to a third but a single Talent, with this General Charge, that what they had received they should employ to his advantage, till his occasions should permit his return to them.

2. I shall now endeavour to vindicate the Providence of God in reference to this Particular Dispensation of it, by shewing that there is no Injustice in the Unequal Distribution of the Means of Grace and Happiness. To
clear

clear this, we must consider what a Reasonable Creature, that is framed to desire its own Happiness, may expect from a Just and Faithful Creator, And surely he may expect, that the Author of his Being, and of his Desire of being Happy, should once at least put it into his Power to be so: And that he should not call him to an Account for not Improving any Advantages for it, which he never enjoyed. These two things, I say, he may promise himself, because a Being Infinitely Good and Just, as God is, could not make him, only to make him Miserable, as he must have done, should he either deny him all Power to be Happy, or punish him Eternally for not improving the Power which he never gave him.

But then there is no Reason from the Nature of Justice to expect, that God should do more for Man than this; because this is enough to make him Happy, if he be not wanting to himself; and if he be, it is Just he should be Miserable, since he might and would not be Happy. For God, who has made us Free and Reasonable

Of Impenitency under the

able Creatures, is not bound to force us into Happiness against our choice, no more than he was bound to Create us at first in a state of Perfect and Unchangeable Happiness. Nor does his Justice require of him, that he should be Equally Gracious to all Men, and put them into the same advantageous Circumstances for the attainment of Eternal Life. His giving better Means to one Person than to another, is no wrong to him that has enough to bring him to the same Blessed State. All that becomes a Faithful Creator is, that having given us Being capable of Eternal Happiness and Misery, he should not deny us that Measure of Grace, without which, tho we should do our utmost to please him, we must be Miserable. And therefore all that is requisite to justify the Providence of God in this matter, is to prove that he gives every man sufficient Power to be Happy, and will take an account of him for no more than he really gives him. For the first of these,

- I. That God affords every man sufficient Power to be happy. I must desire you to weigh the Argument already

ready

ready suggested for it. It is certain, that God has planted an Eternal Desire of Happiness in the Heart of Man, and that this Desire is the great Principle of Virtue and Obedience to the Will of God; and this, I think, is a good Argument to prove, that God does not frustrate this Desire by his meer Will and Pleasure, I mean, by denying any man that Grace, and Assistance which is absolutely necessary to his attainment of it; because the consequence of this would be an infinite and undeserved Unhappiness to him, which is never to be reconciled to the Rules of Justice and Equity. But besides this, God allows every man to expect that which is evidently just and fair from him, and so far makes him Judge in his own case, knowing himself to be infinitely clear in his Dealings with him. His appealing to the Common Notions of men concerning this equity of his Actions towards them, and giving them warning to expect an Universal Judgment, are very plain Demonstrations of this Truth.

Come now, let us Reason together, saith Isa. 1. 18. the Lord; What Iniquity have your Fathers

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Ezek. 18.
25.

thers found in me? Is not my way Equal, O House of Israel? Whence I argue thus: We ought not to fasten any thing upon God which evidently contradicts the Natural Notions of Justice and Equity; and therefore ought not to charge him with creating men under a necessity of being Eternally Miserable for want of sufficient Power to be Happy, because this is a direct contradiction to the Natural and Brightest Notions of Justice and Righteousness. What is this, but to thrust men into the World, only to gain an opportunity to inflict Eternal Torments upon them in the next? And if this be fair and just Dealing, I desire to know what is that we may have leave to call Cruel and Unjust. The greatest Evil we can possibly have any Idea of, is that of Eternal Damnation: And the Highest Injustice is to inflict the Greatest Evil upon meer Pleasure, or, which resolves into it, for not doing something that was ever Impossible to be done: And then to charge God with Damning Men at Pleasure, or for what they never had Power to help, is to charge the Father of Mercies with

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Transcendent Cruelty, and the Judge of the whole World with the Highest Injustice. And I cannot imagine why men that are lovers of Truth, and have a tender sence of Gods Honour, should not be willing to let fall such a Charge as this, rather than own God to be so Good and Just, as to allow every man sufficient Grace to do Well and be Happy; which is a Thought that sits easie upon the Mind, being every way square and futable to its Natural Notions of the Divine Perfections: Whereas the contrary, after all endeavours to reconcile it to the Honour of God, is a *Bold* and *Staring* Contradiction to it.

After this, what need I say, That tis natural to suppose that God hath a Paternal Affection to all his Off-spring: That he has given every man a Law, in his own Breast, to guide him to Virtue and Happines: That he shews to every man what is Good, and does not expect Impossibilities from any: That he gives Common Grace to All, and tis certain he gives nothing in vain: Whereas all his Grace and Favour to Heathens and Wicked Christians would

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would be utterly in vain, if it were not an earnest of Special and Saving Grace, supposing them to make the best Improvements of it, which are possible for them.

2. God will take an account of men only for such Means of Grace as he really gives them. In the day of Judgment no man shall answer for two Talents, that received but one. The Heathens that have but the single Light of Nature to guide them towards God and Heaven, shall not perish for not believing in Christ, when they never heard of him. So the Apostle tells us, Rom. 2. 11, 12. *There is no Respect of Persons with God: For as many as have sinned without the Law, shall perish without the Law; and as many as have sinned in the Law, shall be judged by the Law, i. e.* God will judge the World by a Just and Equitable Rule, according to the Means that men have enjoyed, and the Opportunities they have had of knowing and obeying his Will, and not by any Personal Respects, which too often warp and pervert the Judgments of Men. And then the poor Heathen, that never had

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had any written Divine Law to direct his Actions, but was led by Nature to *do the things contained in the* Rom. 2. 14, 15, 16. Law, shall be tried by the Laws which Nature taught him: The Jew by the Law of *Moses*, and the Instructions of the Prophets: And the Christian, that has far better Means of Salvation than both these, shall be judged by the Gospel, or Law of Christ. And from hence it follows, that God will reckon with man at the last day only for their own measure of Grace, be it more or less; every man shall be accountable to him for so much as he receives from him, and no more will he require at his Hands; and so doing, it is evident, that he cannot be injurious to any. For God is not obliged to give equal measures of Grace to all men, and to exceed what is necessary to bring them to Happiness. He did not owe the World a Redeemer, or so much as a single Prophet or Messenger from Heaven. The whole Covenant of our Redemption was an Act of Pure Sovereign Grace, and not the acknowledgment of a Debt, the non-payment of which had been the breach of

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of any Rule of Justice and Righteousness. In giving men the necessary Means of obtaining his Favour in this and the Life to come, God discharges the part of a Just and Faithful Creator, as he will do that of a Righteous Judge, by calling every man to an account only for the Talents he was intrusted with; all that is more than this, is meer Grace and Bounty, to which we have no Plea of Right or Equity, and therefore have no wrong done us, if it pleases God to withhold it from us.

And this, I presume, is enough to clear the Justice of Providence, as to the various Dispensations of the Means of Grace and Happiness. To which I shall only add, that if we rightly consider things, the case of Ignorant Heathens may not perhaps appear so very hard and deplorable above other mens, as we are apt to make it. For certainly the Disobedient Jews will have a greater Account to give than they, as having sinned against Greater Light: And a bad Christian will have a much heavier Charge against him than either of them. And tho it be true,

true, that *there is no other Name under Heaven whereby men can be saved, but only the Name of Christ*, yet it does not follow that the Heathens shall be never the better for Christ, because they knew nothing of his Dying for Sinners: For this the Apostles themselves seemed not to know till after his Resurrection, and then it is not to be thought that all the pious Jews that lived before them should know it, who yet (we doubt not) were all saved by the merit of his Death. However, it does not become us to judge the whole Heathen World, till God himself has done it; and the rather, because we are assured that he has *Ordained the same Person to be Judge* Rom. 2.16. both of Us and them, and that he will judge *according to the Gospel, i. e.* suitably to the Mild and Gracious Temper of it. And since the Heathens were included in the first Promise of a Saviour, made to all Mankind in Adam, [*Gen. 3. 15.*] who knows, but those of them that worshipped the One true God, according to the Light which he gave them, may be included also in the Common Salvation?

I proceed now to the Second Observation, which is this,

2d. Obser. That the same Means of Grace which are unprofitable to some Persons, would surely have been effectual to the Reformation of others; if they had enjoyed them. Of this we have a plain Instance in the Text; *Tyre and Sidon*, who have the character, both in Scripture, and Heathen Authors, of a very Dissolute People, if they had enjoyed the Preaching, and been so happy as to have seen the Mighty Works of our Saviour, would assuredly have yielded to the Natural Impressions of them, and embraced the Gospel-condition of Repentance, which the Jews rejected and spurned at. And the same Observation God himself makes concerning the Temper of his own People, and other Nations in former Ages, *Ezek. 3. 4, 5, 6.* where we find, when God gave a Charge to *Ezekiel*, and sent him to Prophesie against the House of *Israel*; he tells them before hand, that the same Admonition would certainly have prevailed with some other People, but he must not

not expect the like success amongst those he was going to; for they were hardened in their Impieties, and resolved to have their way, tho they could see nothing but Destruction before them; *Thou art not (saith God) sent unto a People of a strange Speech, and an hard Language, but to the House of Israel: Not to many People — whose words thou canst not understand: Surely had I sent thee to them, they would have hearkened unto thee, for they will not hearken unto me: For all the House of Israel are Impudent and Hard-hearted.* Now what is plainer in these Instances, than that God did foresee that other Nations would have taken the Warnings, and embraced the Messages which he sent the Jews in divers Manners and Ages by the Prophets, and at last by his Son Jesus Christ: And which for the most part, they as scornfully rejected, as they were kindly offered and propounded to them? And accordingly we find, when the Apostles, after our Saviours Ascension, preached the Gospel to the Gentiles, that it Ran and was Glorified amongst them, while the Jews did their utmost to oppose it,

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and put all the Disgrace and Ignominy they could devise upon it.

And the Truth is, this is the very thing that hastned the Gospel into the Gentile World. The barrenness of the Soil it was planted in, through the wilfull hardness and infidelity of the Jews, and the plentiful Harvest there was like to be in other Countries, occasioned *the Lord of the Harvest to send the Labourers* abroad, in expectation of better Returns for all his Expence and Kindness. 'Twas not fit they should sit still, when they might be better employed, and had the Conversion of the whole World upon their Hands.

Act. 13. 45,
46.

And therefore when *Paul and Barnabas* preacht at *Antioch*, and the Jews contradicted and blasphemed their Doctrine, while the Gentiles flockt in great multitudes to hear it, the Apostles (applying themselves to the Jews) told them, *it was necessary that the Word of God should have been first spoken to you: But seeing ye put it from you, and judge your selves unworthy of Everlasting Life, loe we turn to the Gentiles.* And a happy turn it was, for by this Means the Gospel had a free and speedy passage

passage into the World, and where-
ever it came, turned men from Dark-
ness unto Light, and from the Power of
Satan unto the Living God. And upon
this account St. Paul tells us, that the
Fall of the Jews was the Riches of the
World, and the Diminishing of them the
Riches of the Gentiles, Rom. 11. 12.

12. The Poor Ignorant Heathens, that
were hitherto destitute of the Best
Means of Saving Knowledge, were
mighty Gainers by the infidelity of the
Jews, as succeeding immediately to the
same Rich and Glorious Priviledges,
the same Powerful Means of Grace and
Salvation, which the Jews had forfeit-
ed. But that which I chiefly aim at,
is this :

The Conversion of the Gentiles by
the Preaching of the Gospel, which
the Jews rejected, undeniably proves
that the same Means of Grace are both
Profitable and Ineffectual to several
Persons and Nations, according as they
are disposed to use them. But why do
I insist on so plain a Truth, when eve-
ry Society of Christians in the World
is an ample and visible Demonstration
of it?

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Now if the same Means of Grace may have such Different Success, as to be rejected by some, whilst others are reformed and converted by them, from hence we may gain these two Instructions :

1. That the Grace of God is not wrought in men by Means which they cannot resist. Nothing is plainer, than that our Saviour upbraided the Jews for resisting the same Kind and Measure of Grace, which would have wrought Repentance in *Tyre* and *Sidon* : And this we may safely say, was not Irresistible Grace, for then it could not be the same which the Jews resisted. Besides, Christ upbraiding the Jews for not Repenting, implies, that it was their own Fault they did not ; which yet could not be, unless God had first put it into their power to Repent ; but this, it is plain, he did not, if nothing less than Irresistible Grace could have brought them to Repentance.

Now this Consideration, that the Means of Grace are Resistible, should make us extremely cautious of driving off our Repentance and Amendment of Life, in expectation of some mighty irre-

irresistible Act of God, to save us the labour of turning our selves to him. There is no doubt but God can overrule the most stubborn and inflexible Wills of Men, and bear them down, in spite of all their Reluctancies, into the Faith and Obedience of the Gospel; And had he promised them so to do, they might safely have depended upon him. But since he has made no such Promise, and does every day permit Incorrigible Sinners to resist his Holy Spirit, and withstand the Gospel, till they have sinned beyond the possibility of Repentance. How should this awaken those that have any purposes of Repenting at all, to put themselves beyond the danger of miscarrying for ever, by a ready and immediate execution of them? The last care that God will ever take of the Salvation of Men, is long since discovered to them in the Gospel: And by an experience of many hundred years it is evident in all Churches, that the Gospel does not carry an Irresistible Force along with it. It gives men all the Reason, and Assures them of all the Help and Assistance that can be reasonably desired, to per-

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suade them into a compliance with it, and there it leaves them; *i. e.* it leaves them to their choice, to accept or refuse its Proposals, and so to be Happy or Miserable as they please. So that if men will not take any pains with themselves to understand their Everlasting Interest, and to stoop their minds to the Obedience of the Gospel, but wait to see what God will do with them, they will find that he will not drive them into Heaven against their Wills.

2. Hence it follows, that the Impenitency of men under the Gospel, is to be ascribed to their own wilful and incorrigible Temper, and not to any weakness or insufficiency in the Gospel to reform and sanctifie them. The Gospel has sufficiently verified what it speaks of it self, that it is *the Power of God to Salvation*. The Conversions it has wrought in the World from all kinds of Superstition, Wickedness and Impiety, abundantly testifie the Divine Virtue and Efficacy of it: And (what is all along supposed in this Discourse) the Good Spirit of God is always ready to bless the Means of his
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own Appointment, and to make them effectual to his own Gracious Ends and Purposes, without respect of Persons, where men do not distinguish themselves by their wilful neglect or perverse and peremptory Opposition to them. This being the case, there can be no other reason why the Gospel at any time fails of its Blessed Effect, but the stupid and inflexible Temper of those that live unprofitably under the mighty influences of it. And hence St. Paul imputes the Impenitency of such men to their *Despising the Goodness* Rom. 2. 4. *and Forbearance of God, and not knowing that the Goodness of God leadeth to Repentance:* Which surely he would not have done, had he known the While, that God was not so Good unto them, as to furnish them with sufficient Grace to Repent withal.

Considering then what Different Effects the ministration of the Gospel has upon the Hearts and Lives of Men, and the reason why some are hardened, while others are inlightned and renewed in the Spirit of their Minds, we see there lies a great deal upon our endeavours to dispose and qualifie our
Hearts,

Hearts, lest the Word should not profit us, *which is able to save our Souls.* The Best Means of Grace, the most Powerful Preaching in the World, seconded by the mighty Operations of the Spirit, will not soften our Hearts, will not melt them into Repentance, while we suffer them to be *hardened by the Deceitfulness of Sin.* And therefore neither our Saviour, nor his Apostles ever pretended to convert all that heard them, or that saw them doing Miracles by the Finger of God. There is a certain good Temper and ingenuity of Mind, disposing us to be just to our selves, and to the Truths we hear, which is requisite to our Edification by them. *Jesus* heard as Good Preaching, and certainly got as little Good by it as ever any man did. His eager desire of Wealth and Worldly Gains (which seem to have been his Aim in keeping close to our Saviour, hoping according to the Common Opinion, that he would have proved a Great Temporal Monarch) had so perverted his Mind, that the Best Instructions, and the most Absolute Example of Virtue and Piety that ever the

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the World had, could not prevail with him to be Virtuous and Good. We should therefore be very cautious, lest the same Word which is a *Savour of Life* to others, should prove a Sentence of Death and Condemnation to our Selves. But I hasten to the third and last Observation, *viz.*

3d. *Obser.* That the final condition of those that reject the Gospel, and continue impenitent under the ministration of it, will be more grievous and intolerable than theirs, that were never called to Repentance by it. So our Saviour told the Cities of *Corazin* and *Bethsaida*; *It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the Day of Judgment than for you*; i. e. they that have only resisted the Light of Nature, shall then receive a milder Sentence than you, that have Guides and Instructors from Heaven, that have had the Son of God among you, that have rejected his Doctrine, disregarded his Miracles, and refused the Greatest Salvation that was ever offered to men.

Now, that this *Wo* belongs to all that obey not the Gospel preached to them,

them, tho they never heard a syllable from Christ himself, or saw the least of those *Mighty Works*, with which he *upbraids* the Galileans in the Text, will appear if we consider that God has provided as well for the Faith of the Church in this and all future Ages, as he did for that of the Jews, that lived in the days of our Saviour. And if there be as much reason now to believe the Gospel, as there was in our Saviour's time, 'tis certain there is as much reason to fear the Threatnings denounced in it against Impenitent Sinners. I know we are apt to fantasie that the Hearers of Christ's Doctrine, and the Spectators of his Miracles, stood in much better light to discern the Divinity of them, than we do at this day. But wherein does the great difference lie? They saw Christ in the Flesh; but they *saw no Beauty in him* that they should Desire him; yea, they saw him in so humble a Guise and Habit, as raised their Contempt more than their Admiration of him. They had but the same Prophecies concerning his coming, and the Quality of his Person, which the Christian Church from

Isa. 53. 2, 3.

from the first Foundation of it has been all along in possession of. They heard *the Gracious Words that proceeded* from him: But certainly neither *Chorazin* nor *Bethsaida*, nor *Jerusalem* it self, heard so much of the Doctrine of Christ, till after his Resurrection, as the four Gospels have acquainted us with. The Jews indeed had the advantage of being Eye-witnesses of his Miracles, which it is impossible we should have: But besides, that we have Invincible Evidence of the Reality of them, from the Testimony of Persons too Good and too Knowing to deceive us, inserted into the most Ancient and Sacred Records of our Religion, received by the Universal Church in all Ages, and confirmed by the declared Enemies of our Saviour and his Doctrine: I say, besides all this, the Gospel has since received as great and extraordinary Confirmations, as it did by all the Miracles that were seen in *Galilee*; I mean, by the Resurrection of our Lord himself from the Dead, and by the wonderful effects which the Preaching of the Gospel has wrought in the World: By its Tri-
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triumphing over all the Wisdom and Learning of the Greeks, and all the Power and Policy of the Roman Empire: By its Thriving under the hottest Persecutions, and Planting it self in the very Hearts of those, that commanded the Force that was employed against it: In short, by the Gradual Fulfilling of the Prophecies contained in the Gospel concerning the Destruction of *Jerusalem*, and the Reprobation of the Jewish Nation, the Coming of Antichrist, and the strange Figure and Havock which he should make in the World. These things are come to pass since the Death of our Saviour, and we and our Fathers have seen them: And in these respects we have apparently as much advantage of the Cities in the Text, as they had of us in point of Miracles.

Now since we have as great evidence of the Truth of the Gospel, as the Impenitent Jews had, if we resist it as they did, and persist in Unbelief and Disobedience to it, what can we expect, but that the *Wo* denounced against them, should fall with its full Weight and Terror upon us?

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1. For first, It is evident by the Light of Nature, and it is the Ground of all the Threatnings in the Gospel, that Punishment is due to Sin, and that the more and the greater Sins any man is guilty of, the more Punishment he deserves. And who shall tell us what Punishment we deserve for our Sins, but he that is our Natural Law-giver, and our Rightful Judge.

2. God has expressly declared, that he will render to every man according to his Deeds, Rom. 2.6. And then he will certainly punish a wicked Christian, not only for such sins as he is guilty of in common with wicked Jews and Heathens that never received the Gospel, but also for the abuse of Gospel-Grace, the violation of his Sacred Vows and Promises, and the neglect of all Opportunities and Advantages he has had of Improving himself in all Christian Virtues and Graces. 'Tis true, that this Declaration of God, that he will Judge us according to our Works, being part of the Gospel, must be understood in a Gospel sense, (i.e. so as to leave room for Repentance: But then we are to consider, that this very Act
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of Grace, if we do not Repent, will only inflame our Account, and make our Condemnation the more Just and Terrible.

3. To Reject the Gospel, or continue Impenitent under the Dispensation of it, is to frustrate the Best Means of Salvation, the most extraordinary Kindness that ever was shewn to men; and therefore deserves the severest Punishment, and the worst Damnation. We can never hope for Better Means of getting to Heaven, than what the Gospel has furnisht us with, unless God had a Dearer Son, and a more Prevailing Mediator, than the Beloved and Holy Jesus, to bestow upon us. Our Refusal therefore of such a Favour, in the true construction of it, judging our selves unworthy of Eternal Life: And we cannot think that God should judge otherwise of us. But more than this, we apparently expose our selves to the utmost severity he has threatned to use with the most insolent and incorrigible Offenders. *That Servant (saith our Saviour) that knew his Lords Will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his Will, shall be beaten with many*

Ab. 13. 46.

Luk. 12. 47.

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many Stripes. And thus Hypocrites and Unbelievers are markt out for the most dismal and intolerable Destruction. And nothing can be Juster, when God hath made the greatest condescensions to men, that are consistent with his Justice, Wisdom and Holiness, than that they, who would not stoop to his Mercy, should fall under his High Displeasure, and feel the Heaviest Strokes of his Mighty Indignation.

If the Word spoken by Angels was steadfast, and every Transgression received a just Reward, how shall we escape, if we neglect this Great Salvation as was tendered by our Lord, and confirmed unto us by them that heard him? Heb. 2. 2, 3.

Now the use we should make of this Admonition, is to consider the Danger we are in, as to the Publick and our own Concerns; and to hasten our escape out of it.

Let us then reflect upon the Danger we are in by our Great Impenitency, and abuse of those Excellent Means of Grace we have long enjoyed through God's transcendent Goodness and Patience towards us. Was ever People more highly favoured by

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Divine Providence. Was ever any Church Adorned with more burning and shining Lights in one Age, than the Present Church of England is? We cannot plead that we have wanted the Means of Instruction, or any thing else that is necessary to Salvation; 'Tis plain, we have wanted nothing so much as the Hearing Ear, and the good and honest Heart: And for Want of these, many have flunk at the Word of Life, and kick at the Ordinances of God: While others have for many years sat contentedly under them. This, if we add to it the badness of our Principles, and the debauchery of our Lives, is a very sad and melancholy Consideration; especially in the case we are in, who seem to have clean forgot, that the Gospel came into this Island to call us to Repentance.

'Tis certain, that the Judgment of Kingdoms and States is and must be in this World, because there will be no such Societies in the next; and we cannot tell how near the Day of our Particular Judgment may be; but surely it hastens as fast as we do to make up the Measure of our Sins, and we declare that

that we are not to be cured by any Methods of Grace, or any Revelations of the Wrath of God from Heaven. 'Tis no new thing for God to bereave a Sinful Nation at once of the greatest Comforts of this Life, and of the Means of Grace for a Better. And since the Gospel has already taken leave of some Churches, that flourish in their time as much as we do at this day, how should this awaken us to a General Repentance, and to make our Reformation as solemn and conspicuous to the World, as our days of Fasting and Humiliation have been? I grant, we are still a People, in some respects, Considerable in the World: We Plough the Ocean as well, and reap as much advantage, perhaps, as any of our Neighbours by it. We send our Gallant Fleets and Armies abroad, and look big upon the Nations that are round about us. And we are, or might be, a free People at home (if it were not for Tyrannical Lusts;) and in respect of our Spiritual Advantages, are like *Mat. 11,* *per-nam,* lifted up unto Heaven: *23.* But let us not value our selves too much upon these things, but consider that

our Fall is never the farther off, and will be but the more dreadful at last, if we go on to provoke Heaven by our sins, and ungrateful Barrenness under the kindest Influences of it.

However, there is a certain Day of Judgment to come, when God will call every man in his own Person to an account for the Talents he has receiv'd, and the Improvement he ought to have made of them. And since our Eternal Condition depends upon the present Neglect or Improvement of the Means of Grace,

(2.) Let us be persuaded to avoid the Danger, and prevent the Terror of the last Judgment, by bringing forth *Fruits meet for Repentance*, and answerable to our enjoyment and profession of the Gospel. To strengthen this Exhortation, I will leave these two Considerations with you, and conclude.

1. That the Gospel has waited much longer upon you than it did upon the Cities of Galilee, when Christ upbraided them for the refusal of it. In the space of three years, which our Saviour spent in Preaching the Gospel, there could not be much time for his Preach-

Preaching in any other Particular Place, considering what his manner of Life was, that he went about doing Good, and was almost continually moving from one City and Village to another. Now if Christ did so severely Threaten these Cities after so short a Trial, what will become of those that spend their whole Lives in an obstinate refusal of Divine Grace, and after the loudest warnings and summons to Repent, stand out against all the force and power of the Gospel, till they see Death and Eternity pressing upon them?

2. Consider, that our very Profession of the Gospel, if we obey it not, will but inflame our Guilt, and aggravate our Condemnation. We shall be found greater Sinners in the Day of Judgment, than those Galileans that never entertained the Gospel, if after all our Professions of Faith in Christ, and the Sacred Vows and engagements with which we have solemnly bound our Souls to obey him; we should either openly renounce him by a profane and vicious Conversation, or secretly withdraw our Hearts and Affections from him. This would argue such

Bastards and Treachery in us, such vile Hypocrisie and Ingratitude, as east never be forgiven without a New Gospel, and a New Sacrifice for Sin, which no man was ever so wretchedly vain to hope for. And what remains then, but a fearful expectation of the Day of Judgment, and being then found in a worse Estate than Heathens and Infidels? For it had been better for us not to have known the way of Righteousness, than after we have known it, to turn from the Holy Commandments delivered unto us. Let us therefore be so wise for ourselves, as to make use of the Last and Only Remedy which God has left us; and not burn the Day-light of Grace, which still shines so gloriously upon us. So infinite a Mercy ought not to be paid and trusted with. Our Danger grows every day with our Delays: And a long refusal of the Grace of God, is next to a final and absolute rejection of it, and that is the very next step to Everlasting Destruction. Briefly, we have all the Warnings that can be reasonably expected from a Being of Adorable Goodness and Holiness, to break off our Sins by Righteousness, that

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Iniquity may not be our Ruine. He hath solemnly declared, that he Delights not in the Death of them that Perish, but chooseth that they should Return and Live, Repent and be Happy. Let us therefore, now God is waiting to see what we will choose, and which way we will determine our Eternal Condition, ~~hasten~~ our Return to him with all imaginable speed; and not signalize our Folly by being the Authors of our own Destruction, by hardning our Hearts, and delaying our Repentance, till his abused Grace is forever withdrawn, and there is no possibility left us of escaping the Damnation of Hell.

Sermon

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Sermon IV.

The Case of a Late, or Death- Bed Repentance.

Matth, 20, 9.

*And when they came that were hired about
the Eleven:h Hour, they received eve-
ry one a Penny,*

THese Words are part of our Sa-
viours Parable concerning an
Housholder, to whom he li-
kens the Kingdom of Heaven in this
respect, that he went out at several
Hours of the Day to hire Labourers
into his Vineyard, With some he
agreed early in the Morning for a Penny
a Day,

a Day, and immediately sent them to their Work; others he hired at the Third, the Sixth, the Ninth Hour, and some not until the Eleventh, upon a General Promise of doing them all Right in their Wages. Now here was a great inequality in the Time which the several Labourers wrought in the Vineyard; the First beginning early in the Morning, bore all the Heat and Burden of the Day; the Last wrought but one Hour in the Cool of the Evening. And whereas it was expected that the Lord of the Vineyard would have considered this, and made every mans Wages proportionable to the time of his Service, he made no distinction at all between them; but the First, according to their Agreement, received every man a Penny: And when they came, that were hired about the Eleventh Hour, 'tis said, they also received every man a Penny.

Now I need not tell you, that there are those that would infer from hence, that the Sinner that Repents at the last hour of his Life, is as safe, and may be as secure of Heaven, as if he had been all his Life long employed in the Service

vice of God, and working out his Salvation with fear and trembling. And what Sinner upon Earth, that ever thinks of Repenting before he dies, can desire to hear a more delicious Doctrine than this? There is nothing can please a wicked man better, while he retains the fence of another World, than to have his liberty to enjoy his Sins as long as he can, and not fear being damned for them when he dies; and therefore any Doctrine that puts him into a way to do this, must be very welcome to him. And indeed of all that have been prest for this Service, there is none that promises fairer, than that which has been railed out of this Parable of our Saviour concerning the Labourers, and which assures every wicked man that he may Repent time enough to be saved, at his last hour. For, if he may do so, we can never convince him that he may not take his liberty the mean while, or that there is any necessity of Repenting in haste. He may be as wild and frolick as he pleases, gratifie every sensual Desire and dance through all the Scenes of a Comical and Voluptuous Life,

pro-

provided he take care, when he is glutted with the pleasure of Sinning, to Repent once for all; and to do no more wickedly, when he has neither Time nor Temptation to do it. And were this the true and plain meaning of the Gospel, I cannot imagine why one ill man should be an Enemy to it: I rather think, that so soon as ever he came to understand it, he would be perfectly reconciled to the whole Doctrine of Christianity for the sake of this Kind Fare-well to the practice of it. And I dare appeal to any wicked Christian, what ever he thinks of this Opinion, whether he does not heartily wish it were true, and would not gladly see it confirmed by plain Scripture and Reason. Now certainly this is no great Commendation of any Doctrine, but rather a just Prejudice against it: It being enough to make a good and wise man suspect, that it is not sound at bottom, because it takes so universally with bad men.

But let us see what Foundation this Opinion has in Scripture, and particularly in this Parable of our Saviour (so often cited for it) concerning the Labourers

labourers that went into the Vineyard, about the Eleventh Hour, and yet received as good Wages as they that went Early in the Morning, and had borne the Heat of the Day. And because I desire to speak as home, and as plainly to this matter, as the Importance of it requires, I shall endeavour to shew these two things:

1. That this Parable has no relation to the Case of a Late or Death-bed Repentance.

2. That there is no other ground of assurance in the Gospel, that the Repentance of a Dying Christian, after a whole Life spent in Sin, and an obstinate violation of his Baptismal Vow and Covenant, will secure him of Eternal Salvation.

But before I enter upon this Task, I desire it may be considered, That the Controversies concerning the sense of Scripture must be endless and unprofitable, unless we agree upon proper and certain Rules to Guide us in the Explication of it: And surely we cannot easily think of better in expounding the Parables of the Gospel, than first to be strictly careful that we do not set the Gospel

Gospel at variance with it self, or make one Parable clash and interfere with another: And then if there be any difficulty in explaining them, or if it happens that the words are fairly capable of two or more different Senses, the surest way to come to a satisfaction about the true meaning of them, is to observe the Occasion our Saviour took to utter them; to follow the Thread of his Discourse upon that Occasion, and if need be to have recourse to more plain and lightsome Scriptures, the sense of which is agreed upon by the generality of the most Learned and Orthodox Christians. And by these Rules I doubt not but to make it appear,

I. That this Parable of the Labourers has no Relation to the case of a Late or Death-bed Repentance. It was certainly another, and a very different thing, which was intended by it: I mean, the calling of the Jews and Gentiles into the Church at different Times, and in several Ages of the World; and not the Repentance of particular Persons at this or that time of their Lives. If this can be made

out,

The Case of a Late, or

out, then I think it will sufficiently appear, that a Death-bed Repentance has no encouragement from the Text, as having no relation to it.

To make this matter as clear as I can, I shall lay down these following Propositions ;

1st. *Prop.* That by the Lord of the Vineyards hiring Labourers into his Vineyard, is meant God's calling men into the Church, and entering into a Covenant with them to reward those that should be faithful in his Service. The Church, we know, is frequently compared to a Vineyard both in the Old and New Testament, and God is called sometimes the Lord, sometimes the Husbandman or Dresser of it. Thus, Isa. 5. 4. *What could I have done more to my Vineyard (saith God) that I have not done for it?* And that this Vineyard was the Church of Israel, is expressly said, ver. 7. *For the Vineyard of the Lord of Hosts is the Church of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant Plant.* And in this stile our Saviour expresses himself, John 15. 1. *I am the Vine, and my Father is the Husbandman ;* and consequently

frequently his Church is the Vineyard : For since he uses the same comparison which the Jewish Church had been accustomed to, his Discourses upon it had been lost upon the Hearers, if he had not used it in the same sense which the Prophets did. And then, if the Vineyard in the Parable be the Church of God, his hiring Labourers into it, will very naturally signifie his calling men out of the Heathen World to his Peculiar Service, and Covenanting with them to Reward their Obedience to him. And by consequence,

2d. Prop. The several hours of hiring Labourers into the Vineyards, do import the several General Calls by the which God is pleased to invite men into his Church and Service in different Ages, according to the various Dispensations of his Grace and Goodness. Thus he called the Jews, the Seed of Abraham, his Friend, betimes in the Morning, and agreed with them for their Service in the Covenant which he made with them at Mount Sinai. The mean while, and many Ages after this, the Gentiles stood idle, and then in the

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Fulness of time; when the Day was far spent, he called them to work in his Vineyard upon the Gracious Terms and Conditions of the Gospel. And besides these, we may justly expect another Solemn and General Calling of the Jews, who left the Vineyard when the Gentiles entred into it; excluding themselves through Unbelief; And this by the best Light we have from the Gospel, seems to be reserved for the close of the Day, or the Eleventh Hour in the Parable, i. e. to some or other of the last Ages of the World.

3d Prop. The Time of God's Calling men into the Church be it Early or Late, makes no difference in the reward they shall finally receive for their faithful and diligent Service to him. For so it is expressly said, that the Labourers that were hired about the Eleventh Hour, received equal Wages with those that were long before them, in the Vineyard, and had done a great deal of their Masters Business while they were wretchedly Idle, and Unserviceable to him. And hence, how readily does this Truth offer it self to the apprehension

frequently

tion of every candid and judicious Inquirer into the meaning of this Parable? *viz.* that the Gentiles, who came late into the Church of God, in comparison of the Jews; who were not called into the Vineyard till the Heat of the Day was over, and were Strangers to the Covenant of Life and Peace many Ages after it was ratified to the Seed of *Abraham*, shall yet enjoy the full benefit of it, and assuredly receive the same Reward of Eternal Life which was promised to the Faithful and obedient Israelites. And the same reason there is to believe, that whenever it shall please God to call in the Unbelieving Jews, or any of the Nations that never yet beheld the great light of the Gospel, their late entrance into the Vineyard shall not bar them of an equal Reward with those, that have finisht their Work, and are long since gone to Heaven before them.

This I take to be the true Meaning and Importance of the Parable, and to have in many respects the advantage of that which stands in competition with it: Which will more fully appear, if we try them by the

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Rules

Rules before mentioned, and con-
 sider,

Chap. 19.
 ult.

1. The Rise and Occasion of this Parable, or the Dependence it hath upon the Words which our Saviour spake immediately before it: *Many that are First shall be Last, and the Last shall be First*: Whereupon it follows, *For the Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a man that went out early in the Morning to hire Labourers into his Vineyard, &c.*

Chap. 20.
 15.

And 'tis very observable, that our Saviour closes his Parable with the same saying which gave occasion to it; and then I am sure, that can be no Good Interpretation of it, which does not square with this saying: And certainly the truest (if any choice there be) is that which falls in most naturally with it.

Now to put the matter upon this Issue: By the Labourers we understand the Jewish and Christian Churches: And whereas our Saviour tells, that *the Last shall be First, and the First Last*, to the Gentiles that were hired last into the Vineyard, were the first in the Kingdom of Christ; and the Jews, who were first called will be the Last, being cast off for rejecting the Son whom the Lord

Mat. 21.
 33.

of the Vineyard sent to receive the ^{Rom. 11,} Fruits of it in their Season, till the Ful-^{25.}ness of the Gentiles be come in. And thus our Lord himself interprets this very passage, Mat. 8. 11, 12. *Many shall come from the East and West, and shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom of Heaven: But the Children of the Kingdom (the Unbelieving Jews; that reject the Gospel) shall be cast out into outer darkness.* Thus far there is a manifest congruity between the sense which I have given of this Text, and that remarkable Sentence which our Saviour seems to have plac'd at both ends of the Parable, purposely to guide us through the meaning of it. Let us see now, how the Opinion of those that expound it of Dying Penitents, will suite with their being in the First Rank of Christians. Can they be said to be first in the Kingdom of God (unless in the sense that Judas was) who are Traytors to him till their last hour? Or do they do him better or longer Service than others, that defer their Repentance till they can do nothing but ask his Pardon for what they have al-

ways done in contradiction to him? It is to be hoped that there are men, that for many years, from their Youth to their Dying Day, have lived in the fear of God, and a constant exercise of Virtue and Piety; and shall we say, that the best of these come behind those who live as long without God in the World, till they come to the very edge and point of Eternity? I confess I cannot imagine what construction these men can make of our Saviours Prophecy [*So the Last shall be First, and the First Last*] unless they will venture to say, that the Professors of Christianity, who begin not to look towards God and Religion till their last sickness, are before others in his Favour, and may therefore expect a greater reward than such as spend their whole lives in his Service? Which, were it true, I grant would be a mighty credit and encouragement to a Death-bed Repentance.

2. If we view the Context, and follow the Thread of our Saviours Discourse, we shall find that the Labourers that came first into the Vineyard, murmured at the Good-man of the House for making the last equal with them.

themselves, who had borne the burden and heat of the day. Now this is exactly true of the Jews, who repined mightily at the Gentiles coming into the Church upon all advantages imaginable, being entitiled to the same Rewards, without observing the Rites, or feeling any of the Burdens which they themselves had so many Ages laboured under. Nay, this raised their Envy so high, that *St. Paul* speaks of it as the great impediment to their Conversion, the main thing that hindered their effectual closing with the Gospel. But still there was great reason for what was done, supposing the Jews to be the Early, and the Gentiles the Late Comers into the Vineyard. For tho the World was growing old when the Gentiles were called, yet are we generally called as young as the Jews themselves were, and may work as long in the Vineyard, and perform as much and as faithful Service as they did: And therefore our coming after them can be no reason, why our Great Master should not reward us as liberally to the full, as them. He that does a Days-work the last day of the year, if he

was called to it no sooner, deserves a Days-wages as well as he that was hired the first. But I hope no man will say, there is the same reason why a Death-bed sorrow, after ten thousand Calls to Repentance and Newness of Life, should be equally rewarded with the longest holy and most religious Life. However, that our Saviour was not of this mind, may appear,

*Mat. 25.
10, 11, 12.*

3. If we consider the plain scope and meaning of other Parables; such as that of the five Foolish Virgins, who wanted Oyle in their Lamps at the Bridegrooms coming, and while they went to buy, were barred out of his Presence, which the Wife were admitted into; and when they cryed, *Lord, Lord, open to us*, (methinks I hear the Sorowful Death-bed Cry!) received this Dreadful Answer, *Verily I say unto you, I know you not*. And as little coherence will be found between a Dying Penitents being equally rewarded with the most Eminent Christians (as he must be, if we rank him with the Labourers in the Text) and the Parable concerning the Talents, the Moral of which is apparently this, that good men shall

shall be rewarded according to the good they have done, and the several advantages they were entrusted with; and they that have none gone, but squandered away their Lives and Opportunities of Grace, shall feel the high displeasure of God, and with the Unprofitable Servant be cast into outer darkness. Let men impartially consider these easie and obvious things, and they will assuredly find but small reason to build their hopes of Eternal Life upon any struggle or remorse of Conscience at their Death, which few bad men (that have any tolerable sense of another World) are, and even Judas himself was not exempted from.

4th Prop. The fourth and last Proposition is, Were we sure that the hiring of Labourers at the eleventh hour, did signifie the late calling of Particular Christians to the Faith and Obedience of the Gospel, yet this will not reach the case of a Death-bed Repentance. There is a manifest disparity between them in several respects. For,

1. They that were called so late as the eleventh hour, were guilty of no de-

V. 7.

lays, but embraced the first opportunity they had of labouring in the Vineyard. The reason they gave why they stood so long Idle in the Market, *viz.* because *no man had hired them*, implies that they were ready to be imployed, and that they chearfully closed with the first invitation that was offered to them; and so doing they were not to be blamed that they were not earlier at work. For this is as much as *Abraham*, the Father of the Jewish Church, or the Apostles, the first Labourers in the Christian^{church}, did. They came as soon as their Lord called them, tho they were not in the Vineyard till the middle age of their Lives. And I doubt not, if a poor Indian, that never heard of Christ till he entred upon the last stage of his Life, shall then become a serious and faithful Christian, but that his reward will be great in Heaven. But this is not the case of those who were devoted to the Service of God in their Infancy, who have lived many years under the ministry of his Sacred Word, and the obligations of the Holy Sacraments; Who have resisted the motions of the Blessed Spirit, and the admonitions

tions of Parents and Friends, never hearkning unto any till the Rough Messenger of Death comes, and tells them roundly in their Ears, that now they must die and away to Judgment. And 'tis no wonder they are then sorry that they spent their time so ill, while Hell and Destruction look them in the Face, but they cannot but say they had fair and frequent Warnings to have used it better.

2. They who came so late into the Vineyard, had yet one hour of Trial; and this, in proportion to the Day which God allows us to work out our Salvation in, is the twelfth part of our Lives. 'Tis true, this is but a short time, considering what engagements we are under of serving our Creator and Redeemer all the days of our Lives; but still it is much longer, than a Sinner who defers his Repentance to his Death, allows himself to do the whole work of Religion, to break the habits of Vice, to exercise all the virtues of the Christian Life, and to put himself into a posture for Eternity. He vows perhaps, and declares upon the word of a Dying-man
what

what great things he would do ; but alas his Breath goes away with his Vows, and gives him not a minute to prove his Sincerity in.

3. The last Comers into the Vineyard wrought an hour, and therein performed the whole Duty they contracted for. But what is this to the purpose of men that work not at all? For surely to ask pardon for what they have not done, to be sorry for what they have, or to resolve to do better if they had opportunity, will not bring them within the notion of Labourers, and then it cannot intitle them to the reward. This is the state of Dying Penitents; their whole work lies upon their hands, and that's the ground of all their Sorrow, and resolution to work (if it were not too late) which therefore are not working; and to suppose that God will accept them as if they were, is to say that the Master of the Vineyard, who was all the day hiring Labourers into it, was very indifferent what they did there, and would surely have been as Bountiful (if there had been occasion) to those that did him no service, as to them that did

did the most, provided they were but sorry they had not serv'd him at all, and were willing to work just when Night came, and forbid them.

And thus, I think, I have sufficiently proved that this Parable has no Relation to the Case of a late, or Death-bed Repentance; which was the First General propounded to be spoken to. The second was,

2. That there is no other ground of Assurance in the Gospel, that the Repentance of a Dying Christian, after a whole Life spent in Sin, and an obstinate Violation of his Baptismal Vow and Covenant, will secure him of Eternal Salvation. That the Gospel gives no such Encouragement to Men that Trifle with the Grace of God; we may be as sure, as we can be, that the Gospel does not contradict it self; and that not in trivial Instances, but in the great and most essential parts of it, I mean, the design of its being revealed to men, and the conditions it requires of them in order to Eternal Life and Happiness. For,

1. Did the Gospel assure us that God will accept of Dying Vows and sor-

rows,

rows, instead of a Life of Virtue and Holiness, it would shew us a notable way to evade and overthrow its own great and admirable Design, the very end for which it appeared unto men; which was to teach and oblige us to lead holy and virtuous Lives, to deny *Ungodliness and Wordly Lusts, and to*
live Soberly, Righteously and Godly in this present World; while we are resident here, and capable of doing Service to God and Men. This is the end of all the Institutions of the Gospel, and particularly of our Baptism, by which we are amitted into Covenant with God: For therefore (saith St. Paul) *we are buried with Christ by Baptism into Death,*
that like as Christ was raised from the Dead by the Glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of Life: i. e. From our first entrance into Christianity, till we have finisht our Course, and are got beyond the Dangers and Temptations of this sinful World. But where is this New Life, when we are just a Dying? Do we answer the end of our Baptism, tho we never set a step in our Christian Race, till our Life is run out? Or does the Gospel, what-

Tit. 2. 11,
 12.

Rom. 6. 4.

whatever it obliges us to do, dispence with us for not doing it? This perhaps in some mens Opinion would advance the Grace, but surely no man will say it commends the Wisdom of the Gospel: For who does not see, that the design of making us Holy is lost; should the Gospel once declare that we may be dispensed with for not being Holy; or, that it is enough to secure us of Heaven, to be truly sorry at the last that we have lived wickedly all our days. And were this the true sense of the Gospel, I cannot see what Answer can be returned to those that should Object against the Author of it, that either our Satisfaction was not the thing he really design'd; or if it was, that he has taken effectual care (considering our natural averfeness to it, and the fierce and rampant inclinations to Vice, of those that stand in greatest need of it) to disappoint himself of his end; that he has left us all the gains and delights of Sin, and himself the honour only of Pardoning our ungodly and malicious Lives; that we may dabble and bemire our selves in all the Pollutions of the Flesh and of the World, and wash

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wash off all with a few Penitential Tears, when we die; that we may be extremely wicked with good management, to the last; and tho we never glorified God in our Lives, be sure to receive a Crown of Glory from him at our Death.

2. That the Gospel gives no such encouragement, is certain, because it expressly requires Holiness and Obedience to the Precepts of it, as a necessary condition of future Happiness. As it designs the Professors of it should be excellent men, holy in all manner of Conversation; so it excludes them out of Heaven who frustrate its design by wicked and unworthy Practices, and expose its Blessed Author to Open Shame.

Heb. 12.

14.

Mat. 19.

17.

7. 21.

Rom. 8. 13.

Without Holiness, saith the Apostle, (i.e. purity of Heart and Life) no man shall see the Lord. If thou wilt enter into Life (saith our Saviour) keep the Commandments. Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven: But he that doth the Will of my Father, which is in Heaven. For if ye live after the Flesh, ye shall die: But, if ye through the Spirit do mortifie the deeds of the Body,

Death-bed Repentance.

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Body; ye shall live. To them who by pa-rem. 2. 7,
tient continuance in well-doing, seek for 8, 9.
Glory, and Honour, and Immortality,
God will render Eternal Life. But to
them that are contentious, and obey not
the Truth, but obey Unrighteousness, In-
dignation and Wrath, Tribulation and
Anguish, upon every Soul of man that
doth evil. These and many other
Texts, which we must own have no-
thing of the shade or dimness of a Pa-
rable in them, do undeniably prove
the indispensable necessity of a Holy
Life to fit and qualify us for Eternal
Bliss and Happiness. And then to ap-
ply the Promises of Heaven to men
that have lived a wicked, and are
past living a godly Life, is plainly to
expound the Gospel into a direct con-
tradiction to it self. For, can a man
that is dying, be said to have lived
holily, only because he is sadly troubled
for a very sinful Life? Or hath he kept
the Commandments, that has lived in a
constant violation of them, and of his
own Covenant to keep them, and on-
ly promises over again to keep them,
when it is too late? Can we call him
a Mortified Man, that after he has
gorg'd

gorg'd himself with the pleasures of Sin, and sinned away the power of Lust, resolves yet to be very chaste and temperate upon his Death-bed? Or can we say, that he seeks for Glory and Immortality by his Patience and Constancy in Well-doing, who at the end of his Natural is to begin the whole Christian Life, and has always been a perfect Stranger to the Conversation of Heaven?

'Tis true, those that have made it their business to please God, have lived soberly, and kept a Good Conscience towards Men, need not doubt the pardon of their Offences upon their Repentance for them, because their Repentance is ever accompanied with actual Holiness; and where Holiness is the Fruit of Repentance, the End will be *Everlasting Life*. But the case is vastly different in those, that have left themselves no time to reform their lives, and are forc'd to spend that little they have left in fruitless Vows and Wishes: Because these men have neglected the main condition of the Covenant, the great End of the Gospel, and of their Lives, I mean, the Glorification

nification of God by the Purity and Holiness of them: A thing in its own nature necessary to their Happiness, without which no man can see the Lord.

But perhaps you will say, tho those pangs of Sorrow and Devotion, which men that have lived wretched and profligate Lives discover on their Death-beds, cannot be called a Holy Life, yet they are good signs of Repentance and Faith in Christ; and are they not sufficient to intitle them to Pardon and Eternal Life? To this I Answer,

8. 'Tis certain that no true Penitent and Believer in Christ shall finally perish. But then the Question is, whether the Gospel will allow that to be true saving Faith or Repentance, which is destitute of the Fruits of Righteousness, after a fair season and opportunity for them. And here it is but fair the Gospel should speak for it self; *Bring forth Fruits meet for Repentance,* Mat. 3. 7, 8 *and think not to say within your selves, we have Abraham to our Father. Every Tree which bringeth not forth Good Fruit, is hewn down and cast into the Fire. For the Son of Man shall come in* Mat. 16. 27

The Case of a Late, or

the Glory of his Father, and then he shall reward every Man according to his Works.

Jam. 2. 14.

What doth it profit, my Brethren, tho' a man say he hath Faith, and hath not Works? If a fruitless Faith and Repen-

Verf. 17.

tance cannot profit, I am sure they cannot save us. If Faith without Works (as St. James tells us) is dead, how sad is the condemnation of a dying Sinner, whose Faith is dead before him, and whose time of working is over, tho' he seek it with Tears? If sorrow for Sin may be without amendment of Life, and then will not pass for true Repentance, it can be no certain sign of it: And if Christ will render to every man according to his works, how sorrowful is the case of that man, who has worn out his whole Life in Sin, and hardly left himself the least remnant of time to amend it?

2. No man can plead any Title to the Mercy or Favour of God, but by virtue of his Covenant with him in Baptism. 'Tis by Baptism that we are made Parties in the Covenant, which includes all the Promises God hath made to us in his Son, and therefore ought to be the Standard of our expectations

stations from him. And whereas there are Conditions on our part, and we vow Obedience to Christi's Commands, as well as Faith and Repentance from Dead Works; if we fail in any of these Conditions, we bar our Title to the Promises which depend upon them. We cut our selves off by our own Act and Deed, from the Hopes of Pardon and Eternal Life. For where a Promise is made upon more Conditions than one, the keeping of all but one, will not inable us to claim the Promise. And why should we think that God will abate us the Righteousness of Faith (as the Apostle styles Obedience to the Gospel) or that he will accept of a short Repentance in the room of it, when the Gospel makes them equally necessary to Salvation, and we undertake for them alike in our Baptism? Faith indeed and Repentance are sufficient to bring us within the verge of the Covenant: but when we are in a Covenant-state, and have solemnly engaged to walk in the Commandments of God all our days, as we expect the fulfilling of the Promises to us, nothing less than the practice of Piety and Vir-

we can justifie our Pretences to them. This is the Tenour of his Covenant with us; and we must not think, that God will be put off with the renewing of those Vows at our Death, which our Lives have been a continual violation of. To which may be added,

3. That the sincerity of a Death-bed Repentance can never be tried, and therefore to us it cannot be known to be that Repentance which the Gospel requires. Some Instances, we hope, there are of men that have made good the Vows which they made in their Sickness: But alas, how many of those that have out-lived their own fears of Death, have out-lived the Promises too which they made under the Terrours of it! How often have men recovered into a wickedder Life than ever, their Sorrows been but as a Morning Cloud, and their Penitent Tears as the Early Dew, which soon passeth away?

And now from what hath been spoken upon this Head, it is evident, that the Device of a Death-bed Repentance hath no Foundation in the Gospel. Nay, so far is it from that, that it tends to ruin the very design of its appearing

ing unto men, to Debauch the Christian World, and to make Salvation cheaper (after the Direful sufferings of our Blessed Lord) than the vilest Lust that is practised in it. And if this pass for Gospel, I confess, I am to learn what Powerful Arguments the Gospel has left to prevail with the generality of its Professors (who notwithstanding their Baptismal Vow, do hardly seem to be half persuaded to be Christians) to close entirely with the Precepts of it. The best we can offer to them are, that the Religious and Virtuous Man lives a Nobler Life, and is in a safer state, than he that drills off his Repentance, and thinks it time enough to Reform when he is Dying, because he may be surpris'd by Death, which is a chance the other is provided against. But suddain Death happens so very seldom, and the Excellency of the Christian Life is so little understood, that considering the Guise of this World, the hardness of an Impenitent Heart, and the subtilty of the Great Deceiver of Mankind, and the violent and outrageous Affections by which habitual Sinners are hurried on to their se-

veral Delights and Pleasures, no man that hath any insight into the Principles of Human Actions, can promise any competent success, if we have no better Arguments to urge than these. And indeed when the necessity of Holiness is gone (the thing which is struck at by all the Projectors of easie ways to Heaven) Christianity must be a very precarious thing, a matter of Good-will, or at most of very Ordinary Prudence; having lost its great Power and Efficacy to Reform the World. For if the Gospel will secure me of Heaven, and excuse me for not obeying the Commandments of God all my life-long, it plainly leaves me to my liberty to do as I list, which is the thing my unhappy Nature desires: And while I find my self easie, and believe my self safe in this way, I must be under an invincible prejudice against any other that can be recommended to me: 'Tis not Arguing that will reach me now; 'tis not Dry Reason that will work upon me. Oh Blessed Jesus! how many ways have men invented to shift off their Obedience to thy Commandments! But, how can I think that thou canst

to

to turn me from my sins, if parting sorrowfully with them when I die, be enough to bring me into the Joys of thy Heavenly Kingdom!

It is time now to draw to a Conclusion: But I fear you will hardly excuse me, if I should not stay to answer a Question or two in behalf of poor Dying Penitents.

1. First then, May not God in a moment dissolve the hardest and most impenitent Heart, and cast it into a new Frame, whenever he is pleased to shew the Riches of his Grace towards the Vessels of Wrath fitted for Destruction? And whom he Sanctifies, will he not Save? These, I grant, are undeniable Truths, But then we are not speaking of what God can do, or may have done in some extraordinary cases: But the Question is, What he has Promised? And when he has given us a Rule to walk by, and declared he will Judge us according to it, whether he will think fit to vary from this Rule? If he will not, 'tis sadly evident that a Late Repentance is the most Desperate Adventure in the World; and that he will, he has no where told

us, and therefore we can have not Reason to Presume upon it. But,

2. Did not the Penitent Thief go immediately from the Cross into Paradise? True, but did not *Judas* also Repent, and restore the Money he had taken to Betray his Master, and after that go to his Own Place? Was not *Judas* a Profest Disciple, and the Crucified Thief a Stranger to the Covenant of the Gospel? And which of these does most resemble the case of Delaying Penitents? They are, I grant, in no danger of being guilty of *Judas* his sin, but neither are they in condition of making so Glorious a Confession as the Penitent Thief did, when he saw the Saviour of the World hanging upon the Cross. Both these are extraordinary cases, one of which may serve indeed to ballance the other, but then we cannot certainly conclude our Good or Bad Condition from either.

3. Lastly, If the state of Dying Penitents be thus Disconsolate, what roome is there to offer any Advice or Comfort to them? I answer, it does not become us to limit the Grace and Mercy of God, which is the Foundation

tion of all our Hopes ; or to say that he cannot extend it beyond the Terms of his Covenant with us. He hath shewed thee, O Man, what is Good ; but break not thou into his Secrets : He has probably more Mercy in store than he has promised to bestow, and it is to be hoped the Penitent Thief has not exhausted the whole Treasure. Nor do I know any Reason we have to think, that extraordinary Grace is more inconsistent with the End and Honour of the Divine Government and Perfections, than it is with the Honour and Good Government of Pious and Merciful Princes, when they find reason to over-rule the Sentence of their own Just and Righteous Laws. And methinks it is some comfort, that Good Men are generally disposed to hope well of those, whose Repentance at any time is signal and extraordinary. And tho' all this does not mount to a sure Ground of Hope, yet it is such a one as ought to encourage Dying Sinners to all possible degrees of Humiliation and Repentance. This is certainly the best use they can put their last minutes to : If they Repent not from
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the very center and bottom of their Souls, their Damnation is irreversibly Sealed: If they do, we must leave them to the Mercy and Compassion of God: And tho we cannot promise them Eternal Life without the Fruits of Righteousness, because we have no Authority from the Gospel to do it, yet we may and ought to remind them that there are some Monuments of a Miraculous Grace, some Instances in which the Goodness of God has Triumphed over the utmost Spight and Obstinacy of Insolent and Malicious Offenders; and that the greater their Contrition is, the more Objects they are of his Infinite Pity and Compassion to the Works of his own Hands.

This, I confess, is but small comfort in comparison of what they might have enjoyed, had they lived in the Faith and Fear of God; but it is such as the case will bear: And if Men sin beyond the Stated Measures of Grace and Mercy in the Gospel, they must thank themselves if it will not afford them better: But they must not be angry with the Preachers of it, because they dare not go beyond their

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Commission, and have more kindness for them than to flatter them into Eternal Torments.

Now what is the proper use of this Discourse? But that knowing the Fal-lacy and Danger of a Death-bed Re-pentance, we should hence learn the Wisdom of applying our selves betimes to the Service of God and Religion, and securing our Souls while he puts it into our power to do it. 'Tis a won-derful thing, that men should give a-way all their Vigorous Years to Lust and Vanity, the pleasures of which are but for a moment, and yet hope to do a Work that shall stand good to Eternity in a few sickly and languish-ing Hours. What strange Riddle and Infatuation is this? But it is not enough to discern the mistakes of others, and disapprove of their methods to de-ceive and ruine themselves, while we neglect our own safety, and content our selves with knowing where our plain Duty and Interest lies. Let us therefore grow wise by their Example, and the loud and importunate Warn-ings which they give their Friends, when they can have no design upon them,

them, but to keep them from the Tortures which they endure.

We have at most but a short time to be in this World, and every day we delay our Repentance, besides the hazzard we run by it, we certainly make our Work so much the heavier the day after: For still we have the more Sins to Repent of, and we have a worse Nature to struggle with; and should we delay on to our dying Day, what a World of Distraction should we treasure up for our selves against our last hour, when of all others we shall be the least able to bear it? And when all this is done, we cannot assure our selves that God will regard our Sorrows, any more than we have done his Calls to Repentance and Reformation of Life.

Would we consider things as we are sure to find them, certainly we should not choose to leave them at this pass, and to have no better hopes than a Condemned Malefactor has, viz. that tho by Law he is to dye, yet he may possibly be saved by the Prerogative of his Prince, whose Crown and Dignity, till he fell into his Hands, he

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Death-bed Repentance.

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was always an utter and declared Enemy to. No wise man would hazard his Life upon such a contingency: And can there be starker madness than to venture our Souls upon the like Issue, by continuing in an Impenitent State till we are leaving the World, in hopes that God will be better than his Covenant, and when the Gospel condemns us, save us by a reserve of Prerogative Grace?

Let us therefore Repent of our Sins while we may be sure of Pardon for them, and not stay till it is too late, which would be a Repentance for ever to be repented of. Let us consider what a dismal thing it would be, when we are Dying, to have our Consciences flying in our Faces, and accusing us at once of a whole Life spent in wickedness and contradiction to our Christian Profession. And since we cannot see God without Holiness, and therefore cannot Die with any True Peace and Comfort without it, let us resolve, without any further delay, to break off our Sins, and apply our selves to the exercise of all Christian Virtues and Graces. Let us every day, as we draw

The Case of a Late, or

draw nearer to Eternity, mind the concernments of it with that zeal and sincerity, that we shall heartily wish we had done, when we lie panting and breathing out our Souls into a state of Immortality. In short, let us make our Death-beds as soft and easie as we can, I mean, by doing our great Work beforehand, and leaving our selves nothing to do there but to dye: This is the way, when we are tired out with the Cares and Vanities of this Toilsom Life, to find the sweetest repose upon them: To Die in Peace, and to Finish our Course with Joy, and then our Rest will be Glorious. I shall conclude all with the words of the Apostle, by which we may judge of the Truth and Argument of this Discourse, *Be not deceived,*

Gal. 6. 7, 8. God is not mocked: For whatsoever a man Soweth, that shall he also Reap; He that soweth to the Flesh, shall of the Flesh reap Corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit, shall of the Spirit reap Life Everlasting. Which God grant we may all do, through the Infinite Merits of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord,

Sermon V.

The Streight and Certain Way to Happiness.

Heb. 12. 14.

Make straight Paths for your Feet.

TIS evident from many passages in this Epistle, that the Christian Jews, to whom it was written, began to falter in the Profession of Christianity, and to be in great danger of revolting to their Old Religion. Hereupon the Apostle, who, 'tis probable, had been instrumental to their change, endeavours to settle and confirm them in it. And whereas the

the fear of suffering Persecution was the great thing that stagger'd the Hebrew Christians, he shews them at large in the Eleventh Chapter, that the Faith of the Holy Men of Old did use to raise them above any such Discouragements; and then proposes the Example of our Blessed Saviour, the Greatest sufferer, and the most Absolute Pattern of Fortitude and Patience, in the Second and Third Verses of this Chapter. After this he endeavours to raise the Spirits of the dejected Hebrews, and reconcile them to a state of Persecution, by reminding them, that Afflictions are no Arguments of God's Hatred or Desertion of his Children; but rather of his Paternal Love and Peculiar Tenderness towards them; and tho they seem Harsh and Grievous for the present, yet in their Effects they are very Kind and Grateful, as *yielding the Peaceable Fruits of Righteousness*, Pleasure and Tranquility of Mind in this World, and Eternal Rest and Glory in that which is to come. Then follows the Exhortation, of which the Text is part, *Wherefore lift up the Hands which hang down, and the feeble Knees,*

Verf. 5, to
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Verf. 11.

Knees, and make streight Paths for your Feet.

By *Paths* we are to understand the General Course of our Actions; which are then *Streight*, when they lie even with the Rule that God has given us to Frame and Govern them by. For streightness has a necessary relation to a Rule, and consists in an evenness or adequate conformity to it. And then we do make our *Paths streight*, when we take due care to understand our Rule, and being well assured of the rectitude of it, to order our Actions so as to make them Answerable to it; and when we have begun well, to hold on our Course without any stop or deviation from it. Now the Gospel being the Rule of the Christian Life, the meaning of the Apostles Exhortation to the Hebrews, who began to waver in the Profession of it, must be this: Having a Streight and Perfect Rule before you, see that your Actions be conformable to it: Don't faint at any Discouragements, or follow any crooked and deceitful Paths, but keep to them that are streight, as the Gospel leads you, which is the Direct and Infalible

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Way to Everlasting Bliss and Happiness.

From the Words thus explained, there are three things observable, of which I shall speak in their order.

1. That there is a Streight and Direct way to Heaven and Happiness.

2. That this Way may be certainly found with due care and enquiry.

3. That having found the Streight Way to Heaven, we ought to be very careful and exact in walking in it, and not yield to any Temptation to forsake it.

1st. *Observ.* That there is a streight and direct Way to Heaven and Happiness. This is supposed in the Text, which exhorts the Hebrews to make use of this Way, and implies that they were already in some measure acquainted with it. And well might the Apostle suppose that there is such a Way, without being at the pains to prove it, when it is universally owned by all that believe there is any such thing as True Religion in the World; and that is all

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the World but the Atheist, that is of no Religion. Very many indeed are mistaken in their Way to Heaven: But that there is a straight and certain Way thither, was never denied by the Professors of any Religion; for they all pretend to be in the Right Way, how wide soever they are in Opinion and Practice from one another. All the Controversie is, which of those several Paths which men take to be the straight and plain Way to Heaven, is truly so: And certainly to know this, is a matter of very great concernment, and deserves a very serious and impartial Enquiry, for tho a man may fall into the right way by chance, that never enquires after it (which is the case of those that Profess the True Religion for no other reason, but because they were instructed in it from their Infancy) yet 'tis no virtue in such a man that he is in the right: Nay, he does not so much as know that he is, and so long is in danger of being told about, and carried off from one Church and Religion to another, according as the Wind of Doctrine fits, and the Tide of Preferment turns. He that takes

his Religion upon Trust, and never examines the Grounds and Reasons of it, may be easily persuaded that he has no Reason to be Obstinate in it, especially when he is like to be a loser by the hand, and is fairly offered another that promises *the Life that now is*, and pretends to give Infallible Security for *that which is to come*. And hence St. Peter admonisheth the Christians that fled out of Judea for the freedom of their Religion, to *be always ready to give an Answer to every man that should ask them a Reason of the Hope that is in them; i. e.* to be able to defend their Religion and themselves, by declaring (as often as their Adversaries urged them to it) what certain Grounds and Reasons they had for it. And in truth a Religion without Rational Grounds and Motives to induce us to the Belief and Practice of it, is not worth the suffering or contending for.

But perhaps it will be said, allowing that there is a streight and sure way to Happiness, yet there is such variety of differing Opinions and Persuasions about it, that it is hardly possible to be certain where it is, or when we have found

found it. There are so many several Paths, each of which are taken to be the right by those that are accustomed to them (which yet can never be, because they apparently cross one another) that let a man be never so confident of the Goodness of his Way, there are others who, are no less confident that he is in a wrong Path, and must come over to them if he will set himself right, and timely prevent his Eternal Errors. And since there is so great a diversity of Methods in Religion, and so great a Confidence on both sides, how is it possible for a plain man, that would fain go the nearest and the straightest way to Heaven, to be sure to find it? Thus the Sceptick argues against the certainty of Religion in general, and the Romanist thinks there is no Argument like this to confound the Protestants, and to prove the necessity of an Infallible Guide.

But still I hope there is no great hurt in this Argument, and that a plain man may be sure of finding his way to Heaven, after all the Mistakes and Controversies that there are about it, tho there should be no such thing as

an Infallible Guide on Earth. And this I shall endeavour to clear in the handling of the second Proposition, evidently implied in the Text, which is this;

2d. *Observ.* That the streight way to Heaven may be certainly found with due care and enquiry; I mean, by men of ordinary capacity, sincerely using the means which God is pleased to afford them, without the assistance of any Earthly Infallible Guide. Otherwise in vain did the Apostle admonish the Hebrews to *make streight Paths* for their *Feet*: For, supposing them incapable of discerning between streight and crooked Paths, either for want of a Rule to guide them, or a faculty to apply their Rule to the several ways that were proposed to them, it was to no purpose to give them any advice in this matter. They that must judge of their Guides by the Rule of Scripture (as all Christians are required to do) must judge of their Rule first: And they that cannot judge of a streight Rule, when it lies before them, cannot judge of an Infallible Guide: As he that has not the wit to know when

when a Line is streight, can be no competent Judge of a Perfect Mathematician.

For the fuller explication of this Truth, it may be proper to premise,

1. That by the streight way to Heaven, I understand (as it is plain the Author of this Epistle does) the way which God hath revealed in his Gospel; the same which is there called the way that leadeth unto Life; the way of God in Truth; the way of Salvation, the right way, the new and living way which Christ hath consecrated for us; that is, the Method which the Son of God, by his Incarnation and Preaching the Gospel hath put us into for the attainment of Everlasting Life and Happiness.

Matt. 7. 14.
22. 16.
Aik. 16. 17.
2 Pet. 2. 15.
Heb. 10. 20

2. By the sure finding of this Way upon a due and careful enquiry, I mean, that Ordinary Christians by applying themselves to the study of the Scriptures (the Sacred Records of our Religion) with a clear and honest intention, by imploring the Divine Assistance, and making that use they ought of their Spiritual Guides, may certainly attain to the knowledge of all the Truths which are necessary to be

believed, and of the Duties required of them to be done in order to their Eternal Salvation. And this is as much as any man, that is sincerely inquisitive after the Way to Heaven, can desire: For who that is so, can desire to be more than certain of his way thither? Or to have a better Foundation for his Faith and Practice, than the Authority of God himself; who, if there be any such thing as Infallibility in men, must be the Author of it?

Now to prove that we may be certain of our way to Heaven without the help of an Infallible Guide, I shall endeavour to make good these following Assertions:

1. That the Blessed Author of our Religion hath left us a certain Rule to direct us to Eternal Life. That there is such a Rule, is as evident as that the Gospel is the Word of God, or that the Doctrine of Christ is contained in the Writings of the Evangelists and Apostles. And in this all Christians are agreed: Even the Romanists themselves allow the Scripture to be the Infallible Rule, tho they are no great Friends to the Usefulness or Perfection

fection of it. But still we have a greater Authority than this, I mean that of the Scriptures themselves, which declare that they were written, *that we might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God* [i. e. to be the Rule of our Christian Faith] *and that Believing we might have Life through his Name*. That they teach us a Rule of Life, and are able to make us wise unto Salvation, through Faith which is in Christ Jesus. And hence the Primitive Fathers and the First General Councils appealed to the Scriptures as the True Standard of Christianity, and condemned the Ancient Hereticks by the Authority of them. In those days the manner was to set the Holy Oracles in the midst of the Councils, to signify that they ought to be consulted in all their Debates, and that nothing ought to be imposed upon the Faith of Christians, or decreed to be an Article of Religion, but what may be found in the Gospel, and is so determined by that Infallible Rule.

2. Christ having left such a Rule to his Church, it must be supposed to be Intelligible, i. e. capable of being

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understood and applied by those that are to use it as a Rule. Otherwise it can never serve the Great End it was given for; to say which is the highest Reflexion that can be upon the Wisdom of him that gave it. The Gospel pretends to shew us a straight way to Heaven, but to what purpose, if we can never find it by its directions? If we must use it as a Rule, we must learn from it what we are to believe and practise. And if we must do so, I think that is a plain and unanswerable Argument that we may do it. For assuredly God would never make a shew of bringing us to Heaven by a Means which he certainly knows would fail us, if we trust to it. The Institution of Pastors and Ministers in the Church for the instruction of private persons in the meaning of this Rule, undeniably proves that our Saviours meaning was, that all Christians should understand it by themselves. And then it is evident they may do it, so far as they are concerned, and are qualified to judge in other matters. For what use is there of Teachers, but to assist and inform our Understand-

standings, and help us to make a Right Judgment of Things? Or what benefit is there of being taught, if we may not use our Judgment when it is rightly informed, and be permitted to know when it is, and when not? This, I am sure, is the natural privilege of Mankind; and I do not know one natural right that our Saviour by any Institution of his deprives us of? And certainly of all others he would never bar us of this, because his Doctrine would be of little use to us without it. For what sway is the Gospel like to bear upon our Minds; or which way can it influence our lives, till we know the true Sense and Uses of it, which it is impossible we should, unless we may exercise our own Judgments upon them? Let my Guide be never so Knowing or Infallible, 'tis not his, without my own knowledge, that can make me sure of my way. And therefore, unless he has a way to convey his Great Knowledge into me, (and if he has, it is surely through my understanding) I am but just where I was without him, and never like to make any Spiritual Improvement by him.

him. 'Tis the Interest, I confess, of some Teachers, that their Disciples should not see which way they lead them: But those whom Christ hath ordained to this Office, are sent to open their Eyes, and to turn them from Darkness unto Light, that they themselves may see the things which belong to their Eternal Peace.

4. Christians, without distinction, are expressly required to *search the Scriptures*, and to *prove all things* by them, as the Rule and Standard of Truth and certainty in matters of Religion. *Search the Scriptures* (saith our Saviour) *for in them ye think ye have Eternal Life*, John 5. 39. implying, that as there is a Treasure in the Scriptures, a clear discovery of the Way to Eternal Life, so it may be certainly found by those that duly search for it: And if it may be found in the Scriptures of the Old Testament, to which our Saviour here directs his Disciples, there can be no reason we should despair of finding it in the New, being infallibly assured, that *Life and Immortality* were brought to the Light of the Gospel, i. e. were more Emphatically Discovered, being

being set in a better Light to us Christians by the New and Brighter Revelations of the Gospel, than they were of Old to the Jews by all the Writings of *Moses* and the Prophets. And then, if we seek for Life and Immortality, and follow the directions of this Greater Light, we may be sure to make Streight Paths for our Feet, till we come to the Perfect Fruition of them. Nor are we commanded only to search the Scriptures, but to *prove all things* by them, to *try the Spirits whether they be of God*, and to *judge of our selves what is Right*: 1 Thes. 5. 21
1 Joh. 1. 4.
Luk. 12. 57
That is, we must use our own Reason and Judgment in comparing matters in Controversie with the Infalible Rule of Scripture: For some Rule we must have to Prove, and Try, and Judge by: And it is plain, the Scripture takes no notice of any other Rule but it self; and that of Modern and Unwritten Tradition, as Opposite to it. And this is security enough against any Dangerous Error, considering that the Gospel is as much a standing Revelation to the Christian Church, as the Law and the Prophets were to the Jews.

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5. We find the happy Effect of this Course so far, that persons of ordinary capacity, after a competent Trial of it, do rightly believe and understand all that is necessary to their Eternal Salvation. The necessary Articles of Religion are so visible in the Scriptures, that it is the hardest thing that can be for an Ingenious Reader to overlook them. That there is but One God; that He only ought to be Worshipped; that he sent his Only Begotten to Die for us; that he Died and Rose again; that as many as Repent of their Sins, Believe and Obey the Gospel, shall be Saved: These and other Principles of Religion are so clearly and fully express in Scripture, that there is no need of an Infallible Interpreter to certify for them: A common Understanding with the ordinary Means of Knowledge can reach the Discovery, I mean, without the help of a Roman Telescope, or standing upon the Shoulders of St. Peters's pretended Successor. This we know the Certainty of, we feel it in our selves, and we see the Demonstration of it in ten thousand Instances, and do not think the worse of our Faith

Faith for being Protestant, *v. r.* immediately Grounded upon the Evidence and Authority of Scripture: We look upon it as our Inviolable Birth-right to judge of Plain Truths when we see them: And for this we have the general Sense of Mankind on our side, and cannot think it reasonable to put it to any man to judge for us, whether or no there is a God, a Christ, or a Heaven. That all necessary Truths are plain, is allowed by all Christians but those that make Articles of Faith necessary to Salvation, which are so far from being plain, that there is not the least mention of them in the whole Gospel. And if all things that are Necessary, are Plain, then (I hope) a plain man may judge of them, and without asking leave of any other man may believe them; and so doing he certainly is in a state of Salvation: And then the Church that declares he is not, cannot be Infallible, unless a Church can Err, and be Infallible at the same instant.

6. It is far easier for men, (who implore the Direction of God, and use the Helps which he affords them) to find

find their way to Heaven in the Scriptures, than to find an Infallible Guide on Earth to lead them to it. It must be granted, that there are Obscure, as well as Plain Passages in Scripture: Some Places so very Dark and Intricate, that they even Pose the most skillful and judicious Guides: But then our Happiness is, that our Way does not lie thorough them, and that there is Light enough in innumerable other places to direct our Steps, and to bring us in a Streight Line to Everlasting Bliss and Perfection. I do not say, that every thing that concerns our Salvation is so clearly revealed, that no man can be ignorant of it: But that we may know as much as is needful for us, if we apply our minds to it, and laying aside all prejudice against the Truth, beg of God to Preserve us from Error; all which we have great encouragement to do, since he has promised us the assistance of his Spirit in the search of Truth.

The Church of *Rome* indeed offers to put us into a shorter and easier Method of finding out Truth, and to bring us to a Guide that will Infallibly shew

show us every step of our way : So that we need not be at the Pains of any Tedious Inquiries, nor any longer in danger of missing our Aim in them, through the weakness of our own Fallible Judgments. And who would not gladly embrace so Free and kind an Offer as this, provided there be no Trick or Fallacy in it? The Tryal of which will appear, if the Proposers of this way of certainty, be able to satisfy us in a few reasonable Cases, without which (as great as the Courtesy seems to be) we cannot prudently Accept of their Offer. If a man should freely proffer me the *Indies*, I must say it is a very Noble Gift, if he can make it good, and when he has convinced me that he can, I will thankfully accept it from him : but before he can give me Satisfaction about it, I find there must be a few words exchanged between us ; and therefore, if he Pleases, I desire him to tell me, how he came to be the Owner of so vast a Treasure, which is, or lately was, in the possession of so many Great and Potent Princes : And which way he will put me into

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Possession of it, &c. If he cannot Answer these Queries (as I believe he cannot) I am sure he can never convey the *Indies* to me; and therefore I will never trouble my Head more about them. And thus I fear it will fall out in the case of an Infallible Guide to all Christians, who, were there such a Church, or Person as they boast of at *Rome*, that could infallibly solve all Doubts, and put an end to all Controversies in Religion, were richly worth both the *Indies* together. But before I accept of the Conduct of this Guide, I must desire to be satisfied in a few things in reference to him. As,

I. How I may be certain that there is such a Guide, or Judge of Controversies? For I find there is a great Controversy in the Church about it: And if I can never be assured that there is such an one, till he has ended all Controversies (which is the great blessing the Church of *Rome* Promises from him) 'tis in vain in this Age of Controversies to enquire any farther after him. But suppose it were not; may I, or any other Protestant, determine this

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Controversy by the use of our own Fallible Judgments? If we may, then it seems a Fallible Judgment may do more sometimes, than an Infallible Judg. However, a Fallible Judgment is all the Judgment that we have, and if by it we may be certain of an Infallible Guide, which at *Rome* goes for a leading Article of Faith, I see no Reason why we may not, by the same means be certain of all the Rest; and if we may be so, it is plain there is no need of the Guide we are seeking for; and then I doubt, after all our searching, we shall never be able to find him.

But there is one Argument above all, that there is no such Guide, *viz.* That Christ never Promised, There should be one always in his Church: And without a Promise from him, we can never be certain that there is. We know what is pretended in this matter, and what Texts are produced for it, but after the strictest, and most deliberate Enquiry into the meaning of them, we can find no Evidence of any such Promise, nor discern the least shadow or Footstep of a visible Infallible Guide.

We own indeed that God has Promised the Guidance of his Spirit to all that desire the Knowledge of his Ways, but we the rather think that he has not promised any other Infallible Guide than this : For what need is there of the Inward Direction of the Spirit in the Search of Truth, when we have a Guide at hand that can lead us Infallibly into it, and save us the labour of searching after it ? But did not our Saviour Promise to send his Spirit upon the Apostles, and were not they Infallible Guides ? True, but did he Promise to make their Successors in all Ages Infallible too ? If he did, every Successor has an equal Claim : And then how comes the Church of *Rome* to talk of but one Infallible Guide since the Death of the Apostles, and to appropriate that extraordinary favour to her self ? If he did not, she must shew us a particular Charter or Promise, that Infallibility should never depart from the See of *Rome*, and when she does that, we may allow her to be Infallible. But supposing that Christ had

promised an Infallible Guide, it may be convenient to know,

2. Whether or no he has given him Authority to suspend the Judgment of all Christians in matters of Religion? This we must say is a distinct Power from Infallibility, unless we can imagin that our Saviour and his Apostles, tho they were infallible, did not know the extent of their Power: For 'tis plain they did not affect any such Authority, or treat their Disciples in this manner, but both required them to prove the Truths which they heard, and commended their Ingenuity in proving them by the Scriptures. Besides, a Guide whose Directions we must blindly follow, without examining the Grounds and Tendency of them, seems to be a very improper means of bringing men to Heaven. For surely God did design, that in the exercise of our Religion we should act like men; and not lay aside our Reason and Judgment, as things that are dangerous to our salvation. 'Tis true, not to Judge at all, is a certain way not to err; but it is a very blind, and unlikely way to bring

Act. 17. 11.
οὐτοὶ δὲ
ἡσαν ἐν-
γῶνές ἐσσι,
&c.

men to the knowledge of the Truth, without which their Obedience can never be a Reasonable Service. And therefore, if any Church; or Person, under colour of Infallibility, shall assume an absolute Authority over the Consciences of men, before I resign up my Judgment to them, I must desire to be informed, not only how they come to be infallible, but what Commission they have to oblige me to believe as they please, and to strangle my own Sense and Reason, if they offer to oppose any Doctrine of theirs, tho never so absurd or contradictory to them.

But suppose still, there were Reasons to convince me, that there is an infallible Judge, and that there ought to be no Judge besides him, yet because he cannot be useful to me till I know who he is, there is another great Question to be resolved, before I can prudently commit my self to him, *viz.*

How I may certainly know where to find him? And here I meet with one vast Discouragement at the very entrance into this enquiry: Namely, that the same Church, which alone pretends to this Infallible Guide, is very uncertain

tain who he is. Some chain Infallibility to St. *Peter's* Chair, and place it in the Person of the Pope. But this is the most Interested Party, as depending entirely upon the Pleasure of him whom they call Infallible. Others send us to General Councils; some of which have condemn'd the Pope for an Heretick, and contradicted the Decrees of former Councils. But then, what think we of Oral Tradition? Or the Doctrine of the Universal Church conveyed by Father to Son, from the Apostles Time down to the Present Age? The General consent, I confess, of the Christian Church, so far as it reaches, is an excellent means to find out the sense of Scripture. But we are not speaking now of Tradition, or the Church, as a Witness of Truth, but of the Authority of any Church or Guide to prescribe a Rule of Faith and Practice by Verrue of an Infallible Assistance. This is the thing we are enquiring after, and where the Seat of this Authority is; and all we can certainly learn hitherto is this, That seeing there are so many controversies in the Church of *Rome* about it, it will be a very hard thing to find it

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there. And that in the Judgment of a considerable part of that Church, a man may tire himself, and be in quest of his Infallible guide all his Days, and never come within sight of him at last. For suppose he takes the Pope to be the infallible Oracle; he is thought to be mistaken by all those that stand for a General council; and if he go to a General council, he is lost in the opinion of all that declare for single infallibility: And the men for Oral tradition think they are all deceived that look for infallibility in any one Person, or Party in the Church. What must we do now, that have so much choice of infallible guides, and nothing to determine our choice? May we pick and choose at a venture? But that cannot be safe, because they have occasion sometimes to lead contrary to one another, and therefore cannot be all infallible; and none of them speaks of more infallible guides than one. Must we then weigh their Reasons, and the Scriptures they produce for their several claims? These we have often heard and considered, and cannot but admire the confidence of men, who pretend to found the infallibility and other Prerogatives of the Bishop

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Bishop and Church of Rome, upon Texts that speak not the least Syllable of them: Whereas matters of this importance ought to be express in the easiest and plainest Words, that he that runs may read them. If not only the Peace and Unity of the Church, but every man's salvation depends (as our Adversaries must say) upon the Right understanding of these Texts, we have that confidence in the Goodness of our Saviour, that we certainly believe he would not expect we should find out a meaning in them, that by no good Rule of Interpretation can be collected from them. And for this Reason we cannot think our selves obliged, when any thing is said in favour of St. Peter, or the rest of the Apostles, or of the Church in general, to understand it, and more than it implies (as these men would have us) of the Pope and Church of Rome. For why might not St. Peter be a Rock, and Pope Honorius (a Monothelite) and Liberius (the Arrian) no better than Waves? Must the Gates of Hell needs prevail against the Catholick Church, if the Bishop of one Diocese prove not so Or-

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thodox as he should be? And why may not Christ be with his Church to the end of the World, tho he takes no greater care to preserve it from Error than from sinful Practice? And is it not modestly done of the Church of Rome, to engross all the Promises to herself, which are made to the Church Universal? And to argue all along (as she does) upon the Credit of this Notable Principle, That a part is the whole, which bids Defiance to all the Reason of Mankind.

Now since we cannot be sure of our Guide, we must do as well as we can for our selves. We must Judge of things by such Faculties as God hath given us, and if they are Fallible, we cannot help that, but find it to no purpose to judge at all, if we cannot be certain, either till we are Infallible, or till we can meet with an infallible Judge. But the best of it is, we may shift well enough without him, having an infallible Rule to walk by, plain and easie to be understood, by those that are duly instructed by it, in all the Necessary Points both of Faith and Practice. And for Doubtful cases, as they require a Nar-
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power Search, and the Assistance of better Judgments perhaps than our own; so God hath not left us destitute of these Advantages. He hath appointed Men of Wisdom and Understanding to be our Guides; and he hath promised to assist both them and us in the Search of Truth; And if we will be directed by them in things which are above our Level, we may satisfy ourselves with this, that we take the best course we can to make our Paths streight, and to secure our progress towards Heaven. In a word, we may be sure that God is always ready to bless the means of his own Appointment; and that if we desire to approve ourselves to him in the use of them, either he will not suffer us to err, or he will not lay our Involuntary Errour to our charge.

I proceed now to the third and last Observation, which is this:

3. *Obs.* That having found the streight way to Heaven, we ought to be very careful and exact in walking in it, and not yeild to any Temptation to forsake it. The End of all the Advantages we have

have of knowing the Will of God, is that we may readily apply our selves to the Practice of it: If we stop at this, we certainly lose all our Labour in enquiring after it. For 'tis impossible we should reach to Heaven merely by knowing the streight way, or beginning to walk in it, unless we hold on our course, and maintain it to the end. It is to be hoped, that we are all satisfied in our Religion, and that we know why we are so, having measured the several Doctrines and Institutions of it by the Line of Scripture. And if we have done this with good Care and Judgment, let those that take another Course be as Confident as they will; (there will be Confident Men to the end of the world we may be certain,) the while that we are upon the way to Eternal Life, and hope by the Grace of God to persevere in it. But then I cannot promise you that you shall meet with no Discouragements in this way: There is no Road upon Earth more infested with Treacherous and Deceitful Men, that with great Civility will offer to shew you a Readier and a finer way to Heaven, and tell you, if you will

Certain Way to Happiness.

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will but step a little out of your way, to a Friend's house of theirs, they will bring you to an Infallible Man, that will save you many a weary step, and prevent a multitude of Errors, provided you will but be so civil, as to suffer him first to pull out your Eyes, which they say, only serve to mislead you. But if you will be so unreasonable as not to submit to this, you must look to your selves: For the good men profess a very deep compassion for the Blind and Ignorant; yet they don't think themselves bound to keep Faith with Men that have their Eyes in their Heads.

I wish we had no Occasion to understand the Moral of this, But let not your hearts be troubled. You profess a Religion that can bear the Tryal, and has past the Ordeal already. Wherefore hold fast the profession of your Faith, without wavering: Looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of it. Who for the joy that was set before him, endured the Cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the Right Hand of the Throne of God. And be not like children, tossed to and fro, and

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carried about with every wind of Doctrine, through the sleight of men, and the cunning craftiness of those that lie in wait to deceive. Lift up the hands that hang down, and the feeble knees; and make streight paths for your feet, looking diligently lest any man sail of the Grace of God. The way to be stedfast in our Religion, is to be diligent in the practice of it. This will give it a grace in the Eyes of Men, and perhaps convince the Adversaries of it sooner than the best Arguments we can urge them with. And this will secure us from falling of the Grace of God in our greatest Tryals and Exigencies, and from falling short of the Glory which shall be hereafter revealed. I shall therefore enforce the Exhortation in the Text, as it refers to our Practice, with these two Considerations, and so conclude.

I. Let us consider the Honour and Interest of our holy Religion. I need not tell you how much the Protestant Religion stands upon its Reputation at this Day, and how watchful the Enemies of it are to improve all Advantages against it. I would to God, we would all seriously consider this, and
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not betray the Interests of the best Religion by the Wickedness and Impiety of our Lives. 'Tis our Happiness to Live in the Communion of a Church which affords us all Advantages of knowing the direct and perfect way to Life and Salvation. We enjoy the just Freedom of our own Reason and Judgment, and have as much Liberty as we can desire, to consult the Scriptures ourselves. We may go to the Fountain Head, and try the Purity of any Doctrines that pretend to be derived from thence, even when they are brought down to us by a whole stream of Interpreters. So that it is to be supposed, that our Religion hath approv'd it self to our Judgments; and that we call it ours, not because it was the Religion of our Fathers, or had the good turn to be the Establish'd Religion of the Nation; but because we have thoroughly tryed and examined the Grounds of it: because we have proved it by a Rule which cannot fail us, and do find it to be the very Religion which Christ and his Apostles have revealed in the Gospel. Now if we have taken up our Religion upon due consideration, and

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Judgment; it very highly concerns us, for the sake of it, to live according to its excellent Rules and Precepts, and to be assteddy in our walk, as we pretend to be sure of our way to Heaven. If we go wide from the Paths we have made straight, and do not Obey the Doctrine we profess to believe upon clear and convincing Evidence, we condemn our selves, and give just Occasion to the Adversary to triumph over us, and to twist us with the great need we had of a Reformation, to make us worse than we need to have been without it. We put a sharper Weapon into their hands, than any they were ever able to forge against it. A Witty Man may make a hard shite to say something for Romish Errors, but there is not a word to be spoken for an Antichristian Life. With what face can we inveigh against Popish Indulgences, while we allow our selves as great a liberty in sinning as they do? If we are heedless, and undevout in our Prayers; we may blush to say, we cannot dispence with Latin Service, because it is an Hindrance to Devotion. And is it not much at one, whether he that in the holy Sacrament, eateth or drinketh

Judgment

Judgment to himself, does it in both Kinds, or but One? Or what signifies a change, or no change in the substance of the Elements, to him that discerns not the Lords Body? Or why may not an Implicit Faith, serve to make an Empty Profession, as well as any Protestant Faith in the World? And indeed, if that were all we design by being Protestants, it were hardly worth the while to be so; For as *without Faith it is Impossible to Please God, So without Holiness* (as the Apostle tells us in the verse immediately after the Text) *No man shall see the Lord.*

We that are Protestants, profess a great Veneration of the Scriptures, both as a Rule of Faith, and Manners: And therefore we can never excuse our selves, if we do not Govern our Lives, as well as our Judgments, and Opinions by them: And there are those that will not excuse our Religion, but raise Objections against it out of those very Actions it expressly Condemns, and Warns us of the Infinite Danger of. It is, I confess, very unreasonable, that Religion should Answer for the Faults which

it Aimes to Rectify. Yet it must be
Own'd a Real and Mighty Prejudice
to it, to be Contradicted by its own
Professors, and Betrayed by those that
pretend a Hearty Zeal and Concern-
ment for it.

And we have the more Reason to
be Cautious on this hand, because our
Religion is so Excellent in it self, and
so fully Justified by its Learned Ad-
vocates, that it requires nothing more
for its Defence and Vindication from
tis than that we should Adorn it by
our Holy Conversations, and keep the
Enemy out of those Breaches (which
our Divisions have made, and our
Busts have Widen'd for them. And
this is our Proper Post. In which we
may do Excellent service (tho we may
not be so fit to engage in the Field
of Controversies) merely by Exer-
cising our selves unto Godliness, by
keeping to the Plain Rules, and stand-
ing to the Principles of our Holy Re-
ligion. This, I say, is our Proper
Task: And by this means we
shall utterly Defeat our Adversaries,
and put them to the same strait that

Dan. 6. 5. Daniel did the Chaldeans, by leaving them

them no Occasion against us, Except
in her Concerning the Law of our God.
 And for that we give them leave to
 Try their utmost skill: And if by fair
 Reasoning and Arguments (such as are
 fit to be used in the great Concern-
 ment of mens Eternal Salvation) they
 can Win the Victory, let them wear it.
 And while the means while, live could
 clear ourselves as well as we can our
 Religion. *and I wish we could all shew,*
font of a Pure Conversation, that our
 Lives are measured by the Laws, as our
 Faith is by the Revelations of the Gos-
 pel. I do not speak this, as if I thought
 our Adversaries had the advantage of
 us in this, respects but because it may
 be justly expected, that we, who have
 the best Religion, should live at the best
 Rate; That we who pretend to under-
 stand what we believe, and to know
whom we Worship, and have Renounc'd
 the Errours and Corruptions that spoil
 the Religion of other men, should be
 extremely careful that we do not Blam-
 ish our own: That we do not stain the
 Purity of our Profession, and furnish
 Men with Objections against it, by our
 vain and vicious Conversations.

Let us consider the Necessity of walking by the Rules, and obeying the Laws of our Religion, in order to our own safety and Happiness. Tho a Man knew every Foot of his Way to Heaven, and were Acquainted with all the Crooked and Decentful Paths, which others are lost and Bewildered in, yet if he will not make use of his knowledge to Direct his Steps, and keep on in the way he should go, He can never arrive to that Blessed Blessing. We must not think, I will Fly to Heaven with a Wish, not to beayed by being Orthodox, or excused from doing our Duty because we know it. Tho we had all knowledge, and all Faith, without Obedience and Holiness of Life, I know not of what importance they would be to us, but only to Intitle us to the greater Damnation. The Sanctions of the Gospel are the same to Men of all Persuasions. The worst of which will hardly Deny, that a good Life, is as Necessary to make a good Christian, as a sound and Orthodox Faith. So that 'tis not Believing as the Church Believes, nor Believing the Truth as it is in Jesus, nor Relying upon him for salva-

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tion, that can bring us to Heaven, while we bid Defiance to his Laws: For he is the Author of Eternal Salvation ^{Heb. 5. 9.} ~~not~~ to them only that Obey him. If we are ill Men, it matters not what we are besides. Any Religion will serve a wicked Man (as well as the Best: And become him a great deal better than the Pure and Undeiled Religion, which the Son of God brought down from Heaven with him: And which, of all Religions in the World, Denounceth the most Terrible Threatnings against its own Professors, that Reject the Mild and Reasonable Conditions of it. ^{Rom. 2. 7. 8.} To them that by patient Continuance in Well-doing, Seek for Glory, and Honour, and Immortality, It promises Eternal Life: But unto them that Obey not the Truth, how Zealous soever they may be in the Defence and Profession of it, It denounceth Indignation and Wrath, Tribulation and Anguish, without Respect of Persons, upon every Soul of Man that doth Evil. So that, if we live and dye in our Sins, 'tis not material what Church we Live, or Dye in Communion with. While we are in Bondage to our Lusts, all the Absoluti-

ons in the World can do us no Good. If we study to serve and Please God, we need not any Indulgencies from Men: And if we do not, we shall be never the better for them.

I must needs say (after all that has been said on Both sides) I cannot see the least Reason we have to Change our Religion: To leave the *streight Path* we are in, and to go about by the Saints to our Redeemer, and by Purgatory to Heaven; to leave the Holy Scriptures which were written for our Instruction, and to Turn to *Legends* and stories of Saints, which a serious Man would think were composed only for Merriment and Diversion. But tho we have no Reason at all to Change our Religion, yet surely there is great Reason for many of us to make Considerable alterations in our Lives, to change almost the whole Frame and Tenour of them, and to reform our selves, who call our selves *the Reformed*.

'Tis not only for the Credit of our Profession, that our Lives be uniform to it, but our Immortal Honour and Interest depend upon it. We lose the
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Crown of Life, if we faint in the Race that is set before us; and there is no other way to escape everlasting Death, than to persist in the way that leadeth to Life Eternal. If a man should tempt you to renounce your Faith, I verily hope the Danger of it to your eternal Salvation, would hinder you from hearkening to him: But then there is the same Danger in a Prophane and Vicious Life; and therefore the same Reason to forsake every evil way, to deny every sinful Appetite and Worldly Lust, to be cautious of our steps, and having found the Way of Truth, to keep a streight and even Course to the Kingdom of Heaven. Is it not an Article of our Faith, that no *unrighteous man shall inherit the Kingdom of God*? And shall we live in a perpetual Jar and Contradiction to our selves? To conclude, we had as good pin our Faith upon the sleeves of other men, or bestow it upon any body that will take it off our hands, as keep it only to rise up in Judgment against us.

Sermon VI.

Of Growth in Grace.

2 Pet. 3. 18.

But Grow in Grace.—

TIS hard to name any of the great Rules of Christian Piety, without reflecting upon the sensible Decays of it in the present Age; an Age much addicted to talk and wrangle about Religion, very stout and zealous in opposing and maintaining the Doctrines which divide the Christian World; but very cold and careless in the necessary points of Practice; without which the best Religion degenerates into Two of the worst

worst things in the World, Hypocrisy and Superstition. This being our present case, it concerns us to look well to our selves, and *seeing we know these things before*, (as St. Peter speaks immediately before the Text) *to beware, lest we also, being led away by the Error of the Wicked* [the bad Opinions and ill Examples of men] *fall from our own steadfastness*. To which he adds this Excellent Advice, as a certain Rule to prevent the Danger of so fatal an Apostacy. *But grow in Grace.*

"Grace is a Term of Various Senses and Acceptations in Scripture, being frequently taken for Favour, and Acceptance with God or Men, for the Divine Assistance, whereby we are enabled to perform the Will of God, and for those Good Dispositions and Habits of the Mind, which are the Genuine Effects and Product of it. In the latter sense, it is the same thing with Virtue and Holiness, and is most properly so to be understood, whenever, as in the Text, it is the Matter, or Subject of an Exhortation.

Now in this Exhortation, *to grow in Grace*, these two things are plainly applied:

1. A Root or Principle of Holiness, actually implanted in us. We must be in a state of Grace before we can make any progress or proficiency in it. There must be a stock before there can be an increase, a quickness in the Root before the Branches will sprout or flourish, a springing of Grace and Vertue before an *abounding in the fruits of Righteousness*. And this shews to whom the Apostles Exhortation belongs, namely, to men that are in a state of Holiness, and have not received the Grace of God in *van*.

2. It is here implied, That Good Men are not meerly passive in growing better; but may and must do something towards it themselves. Nay, the Text supposes they must do enough to make it their own Act; and that the Work of Sanctification must cease, if they refuse their Endeavours to farther and promote it. Did the best we can do, signify nothing to the making us better, there would be no room for our Endeavours; and consequently no Reason for all the Counsels, Admonitions and Exhortations of the Gospel to use them. The Spirit of God is indeed the Author and Foun-

Fountain of all Grace ; But then he has appointed the use of Means both in order to the Birth and Growth of it. He knows therefore, that by his Assistance, which he is always ready to afford us, we may attain to such a Growth and Perfection in Grace, as is requisite to qualify us for the highest Degrees of Glory and Happiness. And by his Direction it is that we should be frequently moved and excited to use the means he hath prescribed for our improvement in Grace and Piety. And this is a plain Argument, that our Endeavours are very useful to this End ; and that as weak and imperfect as they are, our proficiency in all Virtue and Goodness depends upon them.

Now to make this Exhortation as useful and effectual as I can, I shall aim at these four things.

1. To explain the nature of our Spiritual Growth.
2. To shew the Proper and Effectual means to Promote it.
3. To warn you of the great Hindrances and Impediments of it.
4. To inforce the Apostles Exhortation by shewing what weighty Reasons

sons, and Obligations, we have to be Growing in Grace.

1. To explain the Nature of our Spiritual Growth. The work of Grace is neither begun nor carried on, by natural Principles, without the mighty Aids and Operations of the Holy Spirit of God, who Inables us both to will and to do, of his good Pleasure. Nor does a Christian grow like a Plant, merely by the Influences of Heaven: But by improving the assistances he Receives from thence, and using the means prescribed to him for obtaining new Measures of Grace and Holiness. And hence we may discover both the Principles of our growth in Grace, and the manner of our growing in it. The first mover in it is the good Spirit of God, the giver of every good and perfect gift: And subordinate to it, is the Spirit, or mind, of Man, disposed in some degree to grow in Grace by the means he hath already obtain'd, and excited to greater measures by the Spirit of Holiness, through the use of those means, which he hath appointed for the increase of Holiness in us. To improve the Aids and Operations of the Holy Spirit, by the use of those means, which he hath appointed for the increase of Holiness in us. That

And that there are degrees of Grace in good men, no man ever denied. And the higher and more Perfect degrees are attained by a more frequent, sincere, and diligent use of the means of Grace, all Divines are agreed. The part therefore which every good Man aims at in his spiritual growth, is to improve all Advantages for his growing better, to be more perfect in every Grace, and more Holy in all manner of Conversation. And because some Graces have a more Powerful and Diffusive influence, upon the Sanctification of our Hearts and Lives, and the due Performance of all Christian duties, than others, but improvement in Grace and Holiness chiefly consists in these two things. First in a more constant and vigorous exercise of those Radical Graces, by which the Life of Holiness is conveyed into all the Branches and Instances of it. Of these our Faith in God is the main and Principal Root, all other Graces being Fed and Cherish'd by it, and Enabled to bring forth their Proper Fruits. The Reason why we Love God, which is both the Noblest and the strongest Motive to Obedience, is because we be-

believe that he has all Excellent and Amiable Properties in him. And so the Reason why we Fear him, is because we believe he is Powerful and Just, and will by no means clear the Guilty. And we therefore Hope in his Mercy, because we believe he is Faithful that hath Promised. And as Faith is the Root, and Principle of these Graces, so have they a Radical virtue of their own; a Power, I mean of Diffusing Holiness into all parts and duties of the Christian Life. Hence we are exhorted to *Perfect Holiness in the Fear of God*; and to be *Rooted and Grounded in Love*, that we may be filled with all the *Furnishings of God*; And every man (saith St. John) that hath the Hope in him of seeing God as he is, *Purifieth himself, even as he is Pure*. To grow therefore in these Graces, is in effect to grow in all other kinds of Virtue and Goodness of God. And then secondly, our spiritual growth consists

2. In being more frequently and earnestly employ'd in the several duties of Christian practice; In worshiping God with more Life, Zeal, and Constancy: In doing good with more

vigour, and cheerfulness. In bearing Afflictions with more evenness and patience. In greater Industry, Justice, and Faithfulness in our Temporal callings. In getting a more absolute sway over our Passions, and reducing our affections to Earthly things to a more equal and moderate Temper. In denying our selves the Liberties which have any apparent Temptation in them. In Arming our selves against the insults of Inordinate anger, and the sudden starts of any sinful inclinations. In pruning off the undecencies of our External behaviour, in abating the freedom of our Tongues, and using better care to avoid all appearance of Evil. Herein lies our Proficiency in Grace and Virtue, to which our endeavours in all these instances are strictly necessary, if we aim, as we ought, at a Perfect Imitation of our great example, and to grow up to the *stature of the fulness of Christ*. I am next to shew

2. What are the Proper and Effectual means of our Growth in Grace. And here, since the nature of Grace and Holiness consists in a Conformity to the Divine nature and will, it is Reasonable

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to suppose, that the same hand that drew the first Lineaments of it, must give it the more Lively and Finishing strokes, before it comes to perfection. I mean, that the work of grace should be carried on by the Operations of the Spirit, through the use (especially) of the same means, by which we were made Partakers of the Divine Nature at first. And for this Reason the Ordinances of God are of Perpetual use to all Christians; and the same duties required, as well of the Regenerate, as of those that remain in a Natural State.

II. A better understanding of the will of God, and Attention to the Truths revealed by his Son Jesus Christ. The usefulness of this means S. Peter seems to Recommend in the Context: *Grow in Grace, and in the Knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*; Implied, that a greater measure of knowledge is a special means of growing in other Graces; as is plain by that Parallel exhortation in his former Epistle, *Desire the sincere Milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby*. The To avoid the pure Doctrine of the Gospel, or the word delivered without any

any Deceit, is the most Natural Food for the New Creature, for promoting the Growth of it, and making it every way strong and vigorous in the *Grace which is in Christ Jesus.*

2 Tim. 2. 1.

In the Scriptures we have a lively Draught and Representation of the Divine Perfections. In them we behold all the Glorious Revelations of God's Sacred Will to Mankind, and the thoughts of his Heart from Eternity. Here we meet with the kindest Invitations to the Mercy and Favour of God, and the Merits of a Saviour: With the most admirable Rules for the Government of our Lives, the most Excellent Patterns of the Noblest Virtues, and the strongest Inducements to a perfect Imitation of them. The Myſtery of our Redemption is here unvail'd, and Heaven, as it were, thrown open to our view, that we (as the Apostle speaks) *with Open Face beholding, as in a Glaſs, the Glory of the Lord, might be changed into the ſame Image, from Glory to Glory, by the Spirit of the Lord.*

2 Cor. 3.
18.

By frequent converſing with the Scriptures, and obſerving the Tenour of them, we ſhall not only attain to a com-

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petent Knowledge of our Duty, but to a firm and Ruling Judgment; and be thereby exempted from Error and Doubtfulness, which are none of the least impediments to our thriving in Grace and Holiness.

By this means we shall be continually under the power of conviction: The sense of our Duty will be always quick and urgent upon our Minds: We shall feel the great Motives and Terrors of the Gospel, the Eternal Weights of Glory and Misery, pressing upon our Hopes and Fears, and provoking us to every Good Work, and we shall thence be furnisht with a present Answer to all Temptations to gratifie any sinful Lust, or neglect the Opportunities of securing our Future Happiness. So that by making the Scripture our daily Study and Meditation, we shall neither wander for want of Light, nor be at a stand through any mistrust of our way; nor can we easily fail of making a good Progress in it, being quickned upon all occasions with a present sense of our Duty, and encouraged with a Prospect of our Reward.

2. Regular and Constant Attendance on the Publick Ordinances of Divine Worship and Service. It must be a great advantage to us to be admitted into the Special Presence of God in the Holy Assemblies of his People; And having our thoughts sequestered from the World, and our Hearts warmed with Fervent and Divine Affections, to converse entirely with him, who is the Foundation of all Wisdom and Grace: To have free access to his Infinite Treasures of Mercy and Goodness, a freedom to ask all that we want, and a promise to receive all that we ask; to be employed in the solemn Praises of God, the Great Employment of Heaven, and one of the Chief Delights of Eternity: To hear his Sacred Oracles expounded, the Mysteries of our Religion unfolded, the Precepts of it explained, the Motives to it Inforc'd, the sins against it detected and removed, and the concernment of all digested into Plain Lessons and Rules of Practice. How justly may we expect the sweet Illapses and cherishing Influences of the Divine Spirit, when we meet together for these blessed ends, and are engaged in these holy Exercises?

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cises? Especially, when to these we add the frequent Receiving of the Lord's Supper; an Institution peculiarly adapted to Confirmation and Improvement of all Christian Graces. In this Solemnity we have the Tenderest and most Engaging Representation of Infinite Obligations, which our Blessed Redeemer laid upon us, to mortify our sins which Crucified him, to tread in the steps of his most Holy Life, and to become his *Peculiar People*, being *zealous of Good Works*. Besides, this Sacrament is a Federal Rite, in which we solemnly renew our former Vows, and oblige our selves by the sacred Pledges of Christ's Body and Blood, to remember what he has required of us, as well as what He has done and suffered for us: To give up our selves entirely to his Service, and to perform the Covenant we entered into, when we were Baptized into his Name. And what can be of Greater force to bind us to the Obedience of our Blessed Lord, than such a solemn Vow and Profession as this? If the Holy Bands of the Covenant will not hold us, 'tis to be feared that nothing will ever do it. Now if

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we frequently engage in these Duties, and exercise the Graces that are proper to them, this in a short time will turn to a mighty account; every good Act will strengthen the Habit, and invigorate the Principle it flows from: And we shall certainly experience the Truth of that Promise, Psal. 92. 13, 14. *Those that are Planted in the House of the Lord, shall Flourish in the Courts of our God; They shall still bring forth Fruit in Old Age; they shall be fat and flourishing.*

3. Private Devotion is another help to the Growth of Grace and Piety. Our Hearts are of that Temper, in the Best Frame that ever they were in, so suddenly cool'd, and so apt to return to their Natural Hardness, that we can never thrive long in our Spiritual Estate, without the constant Influences of Divine Grace. And since these depend upon our frequent and fervent Prayers, and the Intervals of publick Prayer are generally much longer than those between our Temptations, it concerns us the mean while to recruit our selves by our private and serious Applications to the Throne of Grace, to which we are encouraged by very Gracious and En-

gaging Promises. And that we may do this to the best advantage, we shall do well to observe certain and stated Times of Retiring to our Closets, and Praying to *Our Father in Secret*: And when we meet with any Interruptions, to make them up as well as we can, either by falling into some Pious Discourse, or by short Petitions and Praises, which the Busiest Hour of our Lives can hardly, unless we will, deprive us of the benefit of.

The Advantages of this course are not easie to be enumerated. The breathing out our Souls to God in holy Fervours and Supplications, when there is no Eye or Ear but his to regard us, is one of the greatest Tokens of our sincerity towards him: And that is the greatest assurance we can have that our Prayers will be heard, and that we shall not want Grace to help us in time of need. Besides, it raises our minds into a Heavenly Frame: It keeps up a lively sense of God in our Hearts: It disposeth us to do him more cheerful and faithful Service: It enlarges our Capacities, and widens our Souls, and fits us for fuller communications of his Pa-

your and Goodness : In a word, it cherishes all the great Principles of Virtue and Piety in us.

4. To accustom our selves to consider that God's Eye is continually upon us. The Reverence every good man has for the Great and Glorious God, when it is awakened with an actual apprehension of his Inspection over him, must have a mighty power over his Spirit, and effectually excite him to do every thing in the manner he knows to be most acceptable to him. We see the force of this Incentive, in some measure, in the influence which a Fathers Eye, or the presence of a Great Man has upon the Virtue and Behaviour of his Children or Inferiours. The sight of such a Witness of their Actions, commands their Reverence, and inflames their Ambition to demean themselves suitably to the regard they owe to the Presence they are in. Much more, were our Minds possess'd with a Lively Sence of God's All-discovering Eye, that He is wheresoever we are, and observes whatsoever we do, should we find our selves moved to do the best that we can to please him ; and this desire would

quicken our endeavours, and our endeavours would improve our graces. The Objects of Faith are much greater than the Objects of Sense; and therefore the Lively Apprehension of an Invisible Object, and especially of Him, in whom we are infinitely more concerned than in all Heaven and Earth together, must needs be more Powerful than the clearest sensible Perception. And this is apparently the Ground of that Rule of Perfection which God gave to *Abraham*, Gen. 17. 1. *Walk before me, and be thou perfect.*

5. Due enquiry into the Nature and Consequence of things, and especially of those Actions which are like to Determine the main Course of our Lives, before we actually engage in them. The want of this care has occasion'd many serious and hopeful Persons to run themselves into a state of Temptation, which in spite of their Future Caution, has proved a mighty Clog and Hindrance to their Progress in Virtue and Goodness, perhaps ever after. On the other hand, a timely inspection into any state of Life which falls under our choice, might prevent a thousand Snares,
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into which we often betray our selves by our Rashness and Folly. We see many cast away at their first Launching out into the World, meerly by carrying more Sail than Ballast. Nor is any thing more visible, than that Right Judgment at the first in choosing our Callings, and contracting our Friendships and Alliances, conduces very much to secure our Virtue and make our Proficiency in it by many degrees more easie and considerable.

6. It will likewise contribute to our Improvement in Grace, to take a frequent view of our Spiritual Estate. By observing and bewailing our Defects and Failings, we shall be strongly excited to amend them. And this will make us more humble, more sensible of our Dependence upon God, and more importunate with him for a greater measure of his Spirit, to preserve us from the like Miscarriages for the future. This will send us to his Mercy-seat, covered with shame and sorrow, for the pardon of our sins: And the bitterness of them will call to mind the Pleasure and satisfaction we formerly enjoyed in the sense of his Favour, through the Faith-

Faithful Discharge of our Duty to him. And this will fire our Hearts with a holy indignation against our selves, for the dishonour we have done to God and our Redeemer, the waste we have made of our Inward Peace, and the opportunities we have lost of doing Great and Glorious Things for our selves, of establishing our Peace with God, and insuring our Election to Eternal Life. All which do naturally tend to provoke us to the greatest care to approve our selves to God for the time to come, which is a steady and Universal Principle of true Virtue and Holiness.

7. Lastly, Serious and Frequent Contemplation upon the Joys and Glories of the Heavenly State, will surely cast our Minds into a more Spiritual Frame, Refine our Conversations, and Improve our Graces. 'Tis true, an exact Idea of Heaven is not to be attained at this distance from it: But did we often consider what we have read and believe of that Glorious Place, we should certainly feel our selves inspired with Nobler Thoughts, and Brisker Resolutions in relation to it; we should not santer up and down after earthly Vanities, nor
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give way to every Petty Discouragement and Mean Temptation, and so make our Journey more heavy and tedious than we need, as if we were afraid of coming too soon to our Happiness. The Glories which are above, were we better acquainted with them, would darken all these inferiour Beauties which captivate our Souls, the smile of Pleasures, the shine of Riches, and the lustre of Honours. Did we fix our minds where true Joys and Felicities are to be found, the gloss of worldly excellencies would vanish and disappear, as lesser Lights lose their Brightness at the appearance of the Greater. There would be little danger of Loitering in the Way, or falling short of the end of our Hope, if we would but keep our Eye upon those Happy Regions above, and consider what Mighty Joys are there, what Massie Crowns are laid up for the Lovers of God and Goodness. We should be all Life and Spirit, even in those very Duties which now go off so heavily with us; we should cut through all Difficulties, and soar above all Temptations from this lower World, if the other was always in our view,
and

and our Hearts were filled with the expectation of it. This would raise our Spirits, and elevate our Souls, till we should even touch and feel the Pleasures of the Heavenly State. And indeed the only way for those that are in a languishing state of Grace, to recover into a healthful and thriving temper, is to strengthen their Appetite to Heavenly things, by livelier apprehensions of the Glory and Reality of them. By this they will quickly come to loath the Husks and Trash of this World, and retrieve the strength and vigour they have lost by their eagerness after them.

3. The third thing propounded, was to warn you of the great Hinderances and Obstructions to your Spiritual Growth. 'Tis evident, that Remissness in any of the former Duties will defeat the Design and Efficacy of them: And therefore every Neglect and Error in the use of those Means is to be carefully avoided, as an obstruction to the end of Growing better. Besides which I shall briefly remind you of these three Impediments,

1. False and mistaken Notions in matters of Religion. Some think they were
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Reprobated from Eternity, and therefore never were in a State of Grace, and then to what purpose should they think of Growing in it? Others, that they cannot fall from Grace, because they were absolutely Elected: And the same Persons are commonly of Opinion, that every degree of Grace is wrought in them by the immediate Operation of the Spirit, tho they freely acknowledge the use of Means. This, I confess, is a very Ingenuous acknowledgment, because it is undoubtedly true that they ought to use Means, and it is apparently against themselves, when they speak against the immediate workings of the Spirit. But I the rather think that their Opinions are not true, because they manifestly tend to check and stifle their endeavours after Grace and Holiness, tho I verily believe they have not this effect upon some very serious Persons, through their Happy Ignorance of the consequences of them. If we are sure that we are absolutely elected to Eternal Life, I cannot see why we should *work* Phil. 2.12. *out our Salvation* (as St. Paul exhorts us) *with fear and Trembling*, because there can be no Fear that an Absolute

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Decree should fail. And then to what purpose is it to make use of means, if the Operations of the Spirit do immediately produce their Effects? For if they do so, there would be no room left for the use of Means; unless there can be an immediate Cause that works its Effect by Means, i. e. that does not work it immediately. And what is this, but to render all the Means of Increasing Holiness in us, utterly vain and ineffectual.

2. Want of Vigilancy over the Faults and Weaknesses of our Natural Tempers. When men first turn their Thoughts to Religion, and their Eyes inwards, they are deeply sensible of their more heinous and provoking sins, and extremely cautious of any Temptations to them, but are seldom very watchful over the lesser Faults and Errors, which are deeply rooted in their Constitutions, and grow up from their Infancy with them. These they are very apt to overlook and indulge (as if they had a Right of Protection from them) till they suffer them to shade and overtop their Graces. There is no man of so clear a Disposition, but he
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has some Flaws and Infirmities with his Excellent Temper : And some Natures are so very bad, that without a mighty care to manage and improve them, nothing that is good will ever come to any Ripeness or Perfection in them. And if it be rightly considered, the want of this care is the manifest reason of the miscarriages of Men, otherwise Virtuous and Good, who are often transported into Great Disorders and Indecencies by an unguarded Humour, or unhappy disposition, which they brought into the World with them, and without long care and watchfulness, is like to send them halting to their Graves.

3. Spiritual Pride : I mean, Pride of Understanding in matters of Religion, and an overweening conceit of more than ordinary Attainments in Holiness. This alone is enough to blast the most hopeful beginnings in Virtue and Piety. This is Root of every new Sect, which brings forth the Bitter Fruits of Self-will, Schism, Error, Envy and Animosity : And (I was going to say) whatever obstructs the Power of Godliness, and the flourishing of Christianity in the World. In short, there is nothing more

Of Growth in Grace.

more directly contrary to the Spirit of the Gospel, than Spiritual Pride, and particularly to that humble and Teachable Frame of Spirit, which is essential to the Disciples of the Meek and Lowly Jesus, and indispensably Necessary to the improvement of all Divine Virtues and Qualities in them.

I shall now endeavour in the last place,

4. To inforce the Apostles Exhortation, by shewing what weighty Reasons and Obligations we have to be growing in Grace. It is, you see, as plain a Duty as any the Gospel Urges, and it is a very large and comprehensive one: But our encouragement is, the Spirit of God is always ready to assist us, and to carry our endeavours successfully through it; and therefore the Difficulty of it can be no reasonable exception against it: Especially considering,

1. That it is a State of Perfection, which the Practice of this Duty naturally leads us to. It is the very greatest Condition, the highest and noblest Attainment we can possibly aspire after. Holiness is the Glory of our Nature,
and

and the Crown of all Humane and Angelical Perfections; so that every time we attain to a new degree of Grace, we acquire a new degree of Honour and Excellency. The Righteous (saith Solomon) *is more Excellent, than his Neighbour*: And the more Righteous he is, the more he advances in real Worth and Dignity above him. The Glory of conquest, the Enlargement of Empire, and the Affectation of deep & curious knowledge, are but Childish and Mean things, in Comparison of a Godlike Temper and Disposition, which is the natural Fruit of Growing in Grace and Goodness. Since therefore the Perfection of our Nature lies in living up to the Rules of Christianity, and Exercising the Virtues and Graces of it, and there is Room for Improvement in the best of us, we should greatly neglect our selves, and stand in our own Light, if we should not continually aime to Grow better than we are, and to Perfect Holiness in the Fear of God.

PRO. 12. 26

2. The certain knowledge of our Good Estate towards God, Depends upon our Proficiency in Grace and Virtue. We cannot argue strongly from the First Essays of Goodness, while our

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Graces

Graces are Weak, our good Resolutions untryed, or our Relapses Frequent. And while we slaken our Diligence, we shall be continually Hovering between Hopes and Fears, and never come to a clear and settled understanding of our spiritual condition. But now, no Man doubts of his sincerity towards God, while he studies to Please him, and is careful to avoid every thing that is Offensive and Dishonourable to him. His mind never troubles him while he is well employ'd, (unless it be first Clouded with Melancholy, which (as one well observes) is not a Reasonable case) but when he grows Remiss in his known Duty, or is Conscious to himself of some wilful Sin, or Deviation from the way of Righteousness; And the onely way to be eased of this trouble, and to be well assured of his Integrity for the future, is to return into the Paths of Virtue and Religion, and proceed Vigorously in them. The more we Grow in Grace, the more evident will our Good Condition be; The farther we Pierce into the ways of Holiness, the more plainly it will appear (to our unpeakable satisfaction) that we are no longer in a State

State of Sin and Death; and that by the Grace of God we are *Delivered from the Power of Darknes,* and *Translated into the Kingdom of his Dear Son.* The Path of the Just is as the Shining Light, which Shines more and more unto the Perfect Day. As the Sun shines the Brighter, the Higher he Rises in the Heavens, so the Light of the Righteous, his Spiritual Joy and Comfort, Increases in the same Degrees, by which he Advanceth to the Heavenly State.

Col. 1.13.
Prov. 4.18

3. Let us Consider, that our minds are of that Quick and Active Temper, that if we do not Grow better, we shall be in Constant danger of declining in our Spiritual Estate, and Growing worse. Something we must be doing, to quiet our Restless Desires and Faculties: And if we don't seriously mind the Business of Religion, the Tempter and our own Hearts will find us other Employments: And the World will Inveigle us with Gaye Promises, and more Charming Invitations, than any the Gospel has, to Gratify our Sensual Inclinations with. If we once make a stop in our Christian Course, we give our Cunning Adversary the Devil, a

fair opportunity to Practise his Wiles and Delusions upon us. He knows the Activity of our Minds : He observes which way our Thoughts rove, and our Affections Wander : What Duties are most Tiresome to us, and what Vanities we most Hanker after : And therefore he will be sure to lay his Trains, and manage his Temptations to the best Advantage : And having found the weak side of our nature, to assault us where he is most likely to do the greatest Execution upon us. It therefore mightily Concerns us, having begun Prosperously, to keep on the Growing hand ; And not lose the Ground we have gain'd, and the Conquests we have made over our Lusts and Vices, by standing still (while we see them Falling before us) with our hands in our sleeves, till the Enemy renew the War, and we are Driven back from all our Good Resolutions, and are Forc't to Retire with Shame and Anguish, to Review the Wounds we Received in our Dishonourable Retreat from Virtue and Goodness.

4. We may next Consider, that God is pleas'd to lengthen out the day of Grace
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(unless we shorten it our selves) to the End of our Lives, that we may be alwaies Growing to greater Perfection in it. 'Tis our own Fault, if ever he withdraws the Assistance of his Spirit from us, and makes our Day of Grace shorter than the Days of our Lives. Nothing but our incurable Barrenness under the Means of Grace, can provoke him to so high an Act of Justice and Severity: But that this will do it, his Declaring upon Oath that the Revolting Israeites should not enter into his Rest, and our Saviours Cursing the Fig-tree that brought forth nothing but Leaves [*let no Fruit grow on thee hence forward for ever*] are very Dreadful Intimations. This Consideration therefore should excite us to *abound in all the Fruits of Righteousness, which are* Phil. i. 11 *by Jesus Christ to the Praise and Glory of God,* Who is pleased to wait for our Improvement, and to furnish us with all the Means and Abilities which are Requisite to it: And is so Gracious as not to Exact at once the whole sum in which we are Indebted to him, but accepts our obedience in such Small Parcels, and poor Degrees, as we are

Luk. 17.
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able to Pay him? 'Tis an unspeakable Favour, that God overlooks the Weaknesses and Imperfections of our best Services, and allows us time and Grace for a Gradual Improvement; And this Goodness and Forbearance of God, if there be any Gratitude in us, any Ingenious Sense of the Infinite Debt that lyes upon us, will strongly engage us to make the best Returns and Acknowledgments we are able, knowing that *when we have done all, we are but Unprofitable Servants.* And then the Danger of Forfeiting the Grace of God by our Wilful Negligence, and of Driving away his Grieved Spirit from us, and so Clouding and Shortning our Day of Grace: How should this Quicken our Diligence, and Inflamm our Endeavours after Grace, to serve God in a more Lively and Acceptable manner, *with Reverence and Godly Fear?* But there will be an occasion of enlarging upon this Argument in the Next Particular; which is this, X

5. The stronger we Grow in Grace, the better we shall be able to hold out unto the End, without which all our Pains and Diligence in Religion will be

be thrown away. A constant Proficiency in Virtue, and Goodness is the best Security against Apostacy. While we go on and Persevere in Well-doing, there is no Danger of our Falling away. All the danger is while we are at a stand, and are strongly Tempted to Return to our former Courses of Sin and Folly. By pressing forward to the Mark, for the prize of our high Calling, we are continually getting ground for our Spiritual Enemies: And the more we keep before them, the less Danger we are in, of being Surpriz'd and Overtaken by them. A State of Sin and Perfection being the two opposite Terms of our Christian Course, so far as we advance towards the latter, we leave the former behind us, and by Consequence are at so much the greater Distance from Apostacy. So that, if we would secure our Perseverance, it concerns us to get as Forward in Religion as we can, and not Rest in any mean Attainments, as if we thought our selves at any time good enough for Heaven, and were sure of our Crown, so soon as ever we had begun our Race. We know not what Tryals we may be Exercised with,

Of Growth in Grace.

or what degrees of Fortitude and Patience, we shall need to support and carry us through them : But certainly 'tis a great Advantage to be well Prepared before hand : And it therefore becomes us to be constantly Training and Exercising our Graces, and Daily Reinforcing our Resolutions, to break through all the Difficulties that obstruct our passage to Glory and Happiness. If we Faint in the day of Tryal, we shall very hardly recover our selves: And if we fall away, we shall loose all the Fruit of our former Labours, and *our latter End will be far Worse than our beginning.*

I know there are those that take sanctuary at the supposed Impossibility of falling from Grace. I will not dispute the Truth of this Doctrine ; I will only remind those who are too Flush and Confident of it (for surely it is too much for Man to venture his salvation upon it) that tho it should be true, it may do them no service : And that for this plain reason, that many that have taken themselves to be in a State of Grace, and had the Character of Good Men, amongst those that were truly

truly so, have at last yeilded to the Charms of this Tempting World, and Neglecting to *Work out their Salvation with Fear*, have Outlived all the Evidences of their Good Estate, and the Fair Opinion of the most Candid and Charitable persons. And for this Reason we should be extreamly Cautious of Presuming too far upon the Grace of God, and Dashing against the Rocks, which many that have had the Steerage of a Religious Education, and seem'd to set out with all Advantages for Heaven, have Fatally struck upon, for want of that Diligence and Circumspection, which is Requisite in so weighty an affair as that of our Eternal salvation. There is no doubt, but that Good Men may Grieve and Resist the Holy Spirit of God: And that every Degree of Resistance is a New Provocation to him, to withdraw his Grace from them: And that the oftener he is Repulsed, the more Danger there is of his Forsaking, those that withstand his blessed motions; And whether this may, or may not, proceed to an utter Dereliction, I am sure we have all the Reason Imaginable to be Cautious of it, Considering
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the Dreadful End of some very Hopeful Beginners : Who, if once they were not Really Good, were Deceived in themselves : Nay, were so Extreemly like those that are Good, that they Deceived the best Judges of Sincerity and Goodness. *Let him therefore that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he Fall ;* And let us all Endeavour, by a sensible and constant Improvement in Grace and Piety, to Grow *Stedfast and Unmovable, alwaies abounding in the Work of the Lord :* And then we may be assured, our *Labour will not be in Vain in the Lord.*

6. The Difficulty in Religion will Daily lessen, and the Pleasures of it Increase, the farther we proceed in the Practice of it. The true Reason why any of God's Commandments appear Harsh and Grievous, is because we are not used to obey it ; For use and diligence make any thing Easy, and all Excellent things Delightful. And hence we find by Experience, that the seldomer we do any good, the unwilling-er we are to come to it again : And the more faintly we set about it, the less satisfaction we have in the performance

ance of it. But now, let us but inure our selves to any part of our Duty, and take care to do it but as well as we can, and we shall quickly perceive, that we are pleased with what we have done, and that it is indeed but the same thing to Please God and our selves. A Good Man is never Weary of Doing Good : And it were strange if he should, for it is the Nature of Goodness to give satisfaction to all that deal in it ; which, I doubt not, is the meaning of that saying of the Wise-Man, *A Good Man shall be satisfied from himself*. When he Prays, ^{Pro. 14. 14.} or Meditates on Heavenly things with due Attention and Devotion, he is as it were in Heaven the while : And never Enjoy's himself more, than when he does any thing well which God requires of him. He that is hardly persuaded to an Act of Charity, and at last does it but with half a Consent, is fain to struggle with himself before he proceeds so far, and so loses all the Pleasantry of it : Whereas he that gives freely and chearfully has no trouble in himself about it, but is highly pleased with what he has done, and finds it a *more blessed thing to Give than to Receive*.

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And thus, could I run through all the parts of Christian Practice, I should not doubt to gain this Conclusion, that every thing in Religion would be Easie and Pleasant, if it were but done as it should be; And consequently, the more we improve, and the better we discharge our Duty, the faster we overcome the Difficulties of a holy Life, and make our progress the more easie and delightful to the End. This is no Romantick Fancy, but a solid and experienc'd Truth. And how should this animate our Endeavours, and enliven us in our spiritual course, that the better speed we make, the less weary we shall be with our Journey? And that having past the first stages of it, if we do not loiter by the way, we shall gather strength all along as we go, and be less tired than we should have been by sitting still the while. Every step will yield us a New Refreshment, as it brings us nearer the glorious End of our Hope, and shortens the Distance betwixt us and Heaven. X

7. Lastly, Let us consider, that the better we grow, the fitter we shall be

to die, and the riper for Eternity. Every degree of Grace will help to support and comfort us in our Last Agonies, when of all the hours we have to live, we would chuse to have our minds easie and chearful, to be well assured of our Future state, and to have nothing upon our spirits that may occasion any bitter Reflections upon the Lives we have led, or any misgiving Thoughts of our approaching Eternity. When our Last and Determining Hour comes, we shall need all the succours which a strong Faith, a vigorous Hope, and a perfect Patience, a good Conscience, and a Holy Life can afford us, to vanquish the Fears, and support us under the Pangs and Strugglings of Death, to make our Passage easie, and our Dissolution desirable. We are generally apt, when we perceive our selves upon the Brink of Immortality, to stand shivering at the amazing Prospect of the boundless Ocean before us, being Naturally very loth to put off from this Beloved World, and commonly very fearful of our landing upon the next. And there is nothing that can perfectly cure us of this Fear, but the
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lively Hopes of a better Life after this, through the Mercy of God, and the Merits of Jesus Christ, upon the Terms of the Gospel-Covenant; *i. e.* our Improvement of the Grace of God, and the Talents he hath intrusted us with. Such a Hope as this will charm our Natural Fears, Disarm Death of its Terrors, and make us even glad to die, and desirous to see that happy World we have so long entertained our selves with the expectation of. We shall not be afraid to give up our Accounts, if we have been Good Stewards, of the manifold Grace of God, but rejoice that our Audit is at hand, being conscious to our selves that we have been doing the pleasure of our Lord, and that in simplicity and godly sincerity we have had our Conversation in the world. When we are going to God, it will be an unexpressible comfort to us to be able to say, that we have walked before him in truth, and with a perfect heart, and done that which is right in his sight. And what greater happiness can we imagine, or chuse for our selves, than to sail with a due preparation of Mind, and a full Tide of Joy into a blessed Eternity?

Isa. 38. 3.

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If there are different degrees of happiness in Heaven, (as I think the Scripture plainly intimates to us) the best men in this World vwill certainly be the happiest in the next. And since there is glory enough there to crowvn all our Endeavours and Improvements, vvhy should vve not aim at as great a share of it, and to rise as high in the grace and Favour of God as we can possibly attain unto? 'Tis certain, we cannot bestow our time better than in laying up all the Treasure that we can in Heaven; where we are sure it will be safe, and will be always in a thriving and growing state, and where we shall find it (after a few days) improv'd into *an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away.*

Let us therefore, having these mighty reasons to quicken our spiritual growth, aspire every day to exceed our selves, and to mend our progress in Religion. They that are but in an Infant-state of Grace, have many stages and degrees to pass through, before they can arrive at any great perfection; and so have reason to be pressing on, lest Time and Death should be too hasty for them, and
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Of Growth in Grace.

not allow them space to finish their Course with Joy. And for those that are grown up to greater strength and maturity, as better Fruit will be expected from them than others, so it would be a real shame and prejudice to them to come behind themselves, and that their last Works should be worse than their first. When all is said to satisfie men concerning the goodness of their spiritual state, assuredly the most comfortable and infallible Evidence of the Truth of Grace, is the growth and flourishing of it. I shall conclude all with the Words of the Apostle, *Wherefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye fall from your own steadfastness; but grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; To him be Glory both now and for ever. Amen,*

Ser-

SERMON VII.

O F

Murther particularly Duelling,
and Self-Murther.

Matth. 5. 21.

*Ye have heard, that it was said by them
of Old time, Thou shalt not Kill.*

THe Precept in the Text was no
Modern saying, no positive
command of Christ, but one of the
Ancient and standing Rules of Na-
tural Religion. It was at first en-
graven in the deepest Characters up-
on the Heart of Man, by the hand
of his Creator; the written Law be-
ing only a Transcript or Copy of
that Original. But even this, as it

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was

230 *Of Murther, particularly*

was no less Authentick, was very Ancient too. Ye have heard (saith our Saviour to the Jews) ὅτι ἐπ' ἐθνῶν πῶς ἀρχαίως, that *it was said to the Ancients, or to them of Old time* (for so the words are most naturally rendered) *thou shalt not Kill*, That is, this Precept was delivered to their Fathers at Mount Sinai under the hand-writing of God himself, and was often repeated in after Ages by his Priests and Prophets. But it seems, it was not thoroughly Understood in our Saviours time, the Jews apprehending themselves clear of this Commandment, if they did not Kill and Murther one another. To rectify this great mistake, our Saviour (being about to give them a larger and more perfect exposition of the Law, than the Scribes and Pharisees, the famous Expositors of that Age, generally did) expressly tells them, that causeless and reproachful Anger is forbidden under the greatest Penalties of this Commandment. *v. 22. But I say unto you, that whosoever is Angry with his Brother without a cause, shall be in danger of the Judgment :*

Duelling and Self-Murder. 231

ment: and whosoever shall say to his Brother, *Racha*, shall be in danger of the Counsel: but whosoever shall say, *Thou Fool*, shall be in danger of Hell Fire. viz. Because this quarrellsome and provoking Passion of Anger, is (as *Aristotle* observes) *πάθος φέρων ἀσπίον*, the ordinary Principle and Cause of Murders: and therefore very Sinful in it self.

'Tis not my design at this time, to insist upon our Saviour's Improvement of the sence of this Law, otherwise than the stating of particular cases may lead me to it: but to treat of that, which all the World are agreed, is the meaning of it; And the rather, because the World has had time (and it seems, has been no ill husband of it) to wear off some of the very deepest Impressions of this Ancient Commandment.

The Scribes and Pharisees had indeed run the people into many gross mistakes, and concealed the best part of their Duty from them, by their false and frigid Interpretations of the great Commandments of God. But,

to do them right, they were much better expounders of this Law, than many of our Modern Christians, who with Pens of Steel, and in Letters of Bloud, are ready to justify, that Killing (for Honour) is no Murther; And that it is rather an Act of Mercy and Prudence, than of Cruelty and Disobedience, when we are oppress'd with the Miseries of this Life, to find the shortest Way we can into the next, and to put an end to our Own Lives, when they are less desirable than Death it self.

These are the Sentiments of Men of very different Complexion. The former are generally Men of Flame and Spirit, of a hot sanguine Temper; which is seldom reckon'd the best Friend to a solid Judgment; The latter for the most part are of a Melancholy Constitution, and while their Understandings are clouded with that dark Humour, must needs stand but in an Ill light to discern the Truth. But what ever their Judgments are in other matters, they seem to have clean forgot the Primary and most obvious meaning of what

what was said of Old time, *Thou shalt not Kill.*

Which Precept, being exprest in very few Words, will require the larger Explication: and the rather because it is undoubtedly lawful in some cases to Kill, and these must be known before we can certainly Determine wherein the nature of the hainous Sin of Murther consists, which all men agree to be forbidden in this Law. For these Reasons, in speaking to these Words, I shall shew,

1. In what cases it may be justly supposed, that Killing is not forbidden in this law.

2. What the Sin of Murther, or the Killing here forbidden is.

3. Wherein the Hainousness of this Sin consists. And then I shall consider.

4. Whether it be lawful or not, to Kill a Rival in a Quarrel of Honour: or to Kill our selves when we are grown weary of our lives.

1. In what cases it may be justly supposed, that Killing is not forbidden in this Law. Life is the gift of God, which he bestows upon us as

a thing sacred, to be preserved for his Use, and not dispos'd of without
Gen. 2. 7. his leave and pleasure. It is he that Breatheth into Man the breath of Life, and being absolute Lord of it, there is no Question but he may resume it when and by what Instruments he pleases. And that there are Crimes worthy of Death, both the Scriptures and Natural Reasons do assure us. Yea such Crimes their are, as, were they not sometimes punisht with Death, would suddenly dash all human Society in pieces, and bring the World into such confusion that there would be no living amongst men. And therefore it may be reasonably presumed, that Killing is not prohibited in all cases. For instance,

When a Magistrate puts an Offendor to Death, that is worthy of it, in a regular course of Justice, he is not to be charged with the Breach of this Law. He has his Authority from God, the Supreme Judge and Sovereign Lord of Life and Death; He Acts as his Minister, by express Commission from him, and therefore

fore is Innocent of all the Bloud that is shed by the Sword of Justice, and hence St. *Paul* calls the Magistrate a *Rom. 13, Terrour to Evil Workers*, because he *3. 4. beareth not the Sword in vain, being the Minister of God, a Revenger to execute Wrath upon him, that doth Evil.* Nor hath God only given a General Commission to Seize the forfeited Lives of great and haynous Offenders, but in some cases (as in that of the Murtherer himself) He particularly Commands the Use of this severity, as a standing Rule of of Equity and Justice [*Gen. 9. 6.*] *For who so shedeth mans Bloud by man shall his Bloud be shed.* And for the same reason.

Killing in the Wars, when the cause is Just, and the War necessary for the Preservation of the Publick, is no part of the meaning of this Law. For it is not to be supposed, that God who sets up Kings and Governments for the Defence of the common Safety, should restrain them from Drawing the Sword of War, when there is no other means to preserve it. The Swords of Princes

are the greatest Instruments of Providence in the World: and the Best and Noblest Use of them, is the Protection of their Subjects from Oppression and Violence, in the Enjoyment of all the Blessings of this, and the Advantages for a better Life, which the Bounty of Heaven hath inricht them with. And therefore our Saviour never went about to tye the hands of Sovereign Princes, or States, from the use of this sharp and last Remedy, in a Just and Necessary Cause; nor was the Gospel ever accused for being an Enemy to the Throue, upon this account. There being no Tribunal upon Earth high enough to decide the Quarrels between Independent Governments and Nations, it is a natural and strong Presumption, when all amicable ways of Peace and Reconciliation fail, that God approves of the injured Party's Appealing to him in the Field of War, as the supreme Judge and Guardian of Right and Innocence. And by consequence, a Souldier that serves in a lawful War, is not forbid to Kill the Enemy of his Prince

Princes and Country: he is in this Case a Minister of Divine Justice, being invested with Authority from him, *to whom vengeance belongeth.*

These are Publick cases, in which the Authority of God over the Life of Man, is manifestly derived immediately to the Sovereign, and by him to inferior Magistrates and dispensers of Justice. Besides which,

It may be reasonably presumed, that when a private Person is desperately Assaulted, and in the necessary Defence of his own Life takes away the Invaders, he hath done nothing against the Intent of this Law. Every man hath a natural Right to defend the Life which God hath given him, against him that shall attempt by unjust or Illegal Violence, to wrest it from him. This also, as well as Life it self, is the gift of God. It is a Debt we owe to the Lord and giver of Life, to keep it for his service, till he is pleased to call for it, which he never do's by the hand of a Murderer. And therefore when we are reduced to that Extremity, that we can neither Fly to the Protection

Protection of the Magistrate, nor escape with our Lives with out taking away the Life of him that Assails us, if he Perish in his wicked Enterprise, his Bloud will not be Required at our hands, 'tis better for the Publick to lose a Bad than a Good and useful Member : and when the case is such, that one of them must fall by the others hand 'tis reasonable to suppose that both God and his Ministers of Justice do agree in the same choice, and by a virtual Commission impower the Innocent Person to execute their Vengeance upon the guiltty, and to slay the Invader, rather than be Murthered by him. And this, I think, is the sense of our Laws : and was so of the Roman ; which allowed the Killing of a Thief in the day time, *Si se telo defenderit*, if he offered to make use of his Weapon ; And much more may we presume upon the lawfulness of saving our lives, when we are Assaulted with a Mortal Violence ; and it is evident, after all our care to prevent and escape it, that unless we immediately return it, there is but a Moment

Moment between us and Death.

These are all the ordinary cases in which it is lawful to take away the Life of Man. There is one indeed of a more Heroical Nature, which has fair Pretences to the like Immunity from this Law : *viz.* When a Man is cast into those Circumstances, that either he must yield up the Life of his Friend (that is as his own Soul) or save it by taking away his Enemys from him. But this Case is liable to such infinite abuses and variety of Circumstances, that as the Tenderneſs of our Laws in this matter ſhews the Wiſdom of our Law-givers, ſo it is perhaps the beſt light that can be given into it.

2. The Second thing was to ſhew, what the Sin of Murther, or the Killing here forbidden, is ; by what hath been ſpoken it is eaſy to apprehend that this Law Prohibits the bereaving our Neighbour of his Life without Authority, Juſtice, or Neceſſity enforcing to it. The Inſtances of which are, when a man of his own motion compaſſes the Death of another, in a wilful, Treacherous,

ous, Revengeful, or sportive manner: or is necessary to it at the Instigation of any Person not invested with competent Authority; whether this be done to cover our Shame, or to heal what we call our Honour, or with respect to any convenience, Satisfaction, or Advantage to our selves; whether we do this by open Assault and Violence, or by secret and malicious Craft: under the colour of Religion or Law; in the Face of the Sun, or under the Mask of Night; whether immediately by our selves, or by wicked Instruments, by Perjury or Poyson, by false Suggestions, evil Counsel or enticements, or any other Means or Method tending to the untimely Death and Destruction of our Neighbour.

This is the Sin of Murther directly forbidden in the sixth Commandment. The first and immediate Design of which, is to preserve the Life of our Neighbour: which is generally of all other Blessings the dearest to him, and ought to be highly valued, because all the rest of his enjoyments, and advantages of
doing

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doing good (at least) in this World do depend upon it.

Now it must be supposed, that God, who forbids the Killing of our Neighbour, and expressly Commands us to love him as our selves, does by consequence also forbid the Killing of our selves. For we have no more Power over our own, than we have over the Lives of other Men. *Have Mal. 2.10. we not all one Father? hath not one God Created us?* and hath he not Created us after his own Image? the preservation of which in Man is the manifest end and intention of this Commandment. But of this I shall have occasion to speak more fully under the last General.

3. The next thing to be spoken to, is the hainousness of the Sin of Murther. It is generally condemned by the voice of God and Men, as one of the greatest strains of Wickedness and Inhumanity: and is indeed a crime of the largest size, and the highest Provocation, of any against the second Table of the Law. The very Relation of the Fact strikes every Innocent Breast with Horrour, and

and raises a mighty Indignation against the Murtherer, The mean while his own Conscience pursues him; and whither soever he flies, his Accuser, Witness, and Judge are with him, the Altar is no Sanctuary to him; for God, who is greater than his Conscience, hears the dreadful Cry of his Sin, strongly importuning him to hasten down his Vengeance upon him. We have an instance of this in the first Act of this kind that ever was Committed: *The Voice of thy Brothers Bloud* (saith the Lord to Cain) *cryeth unto me from the Ground*, Gen. 4. 10. And, 'tis observable, how quick and severe an Answer it received [11, 12. verses.] *And now art thou cursed from the Earth: a Fugitive and a Vagabond shalt thou be upon it.*

Nay the Malignity of this Sin is such, that it defiles the Land where it is Committed, and leaves a guilt upon it, that is not to be expiated but by the Bloud of the Murtherer. And therefore no Sanctuary was provided for him in *Israel*. and if he fled to any of the Cities of Refuge, he

he was thence to be taken by the special Command of God, and immediately given up to Justice; *Thou shalt take him* (saith God) *from mine Altar, that he may Dye*, *Exod.* 21. 14, and on this account God is said to *make Inquisition for Blood*: i. e. *Pf.* 9. 12. to search out the shedder of it, and to drive him out of all his Refuge, till he fall into the hands of his inexorable Justice.

Now since there is so terrible an outcry against the Murtherer: since Heaven and Earth are so highly incens't against him, and so much concern'd to Punish him, there must be a more than ordinary Malignity and Provocation in the Sin, which calls so loud for so solemn a Vengeance. And wherein this consists, will appear with the least glance of our Thoughts upon these Particulars.

1. That it bids Defiance to the Majesty and Authority of God, and in the nature of it directly tends to extinguish his Government in the World: It snatches the Sword of Justice out of his hand, and employ's
it

it to the Destruction of his Creatures and Subjects, contrary to his declared will, and most sacred Prerogative. every time this Sin is punished in its kind, two at least of his Subjects are cashiered out of the Land of the living, the Kingdom he hath Founded amongst men.

It is a peculiar affront to the Divine Nature, as it defaces the Image of God in Man, on this account it is *ἱεροσυλιῶν ἡ μέγιστη*, the very greatest Sacrilege, as *Philo* calls it: a robbing God of that Creature which he hath appointed to represent him in this lower World, which approacheth the nearest in Perfection to him, being made for his own society, and of all his works hath the liveliest resemblance of Divinity upon it. And therefore, when God pronounceth

Gen. 9.6. Sentence upon the Murtherer [*who so sheddeth Mans Bloud, by Man shall his Bloud be shed*] he assigneth this reason for it: *For in the Image of God made he Man.*

3. Murther is an Act of excessive Mischief and Cruelty to our Neighbour: the utmost wrong that Malice,

Malice assisted with Rage and Violence, can do him. Life, besides the the natural Sweetness of it, is the Foundation of all other Blessings, which we do or can enjoy in this World. It also gives us a blessed opportunity (and the only one we can have) of laying a good Foundation for Eternal Life. And therefore it must be an inconceivable Damage to be wrongfully deprived of so vast a Benefit, and hurried out of so dear an Enjoyment; to be stript Naked to our very Being and Essence, and turn'd out, perhaps in a Moment, into a miserable Eternity. This loss can never be repaired, or so much as computed unless we could count the years of Eternity, or had certain knowledge of the future Estates of men, and were sure that Heaven stood always open as a Sanctuary to those, whom some men in their Rage and Madness judge unworthy to live upon the Earth.

4. It is an injury of vast extent in reference to the publick. It is the grief of all men that have any Bowels or tendernefs of Nature in

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them, and a signal Prejudice to those that are in Authority, the Magistrate is robb'd of a Subject by it; his right of Judging and doing Justice between men, is violently assaulted and ravished from him. His Laws, the great Security of mens Lives and Properties, are broken and contemned; the Publick Peace, his peculiar Charge and Province, is interrupted and violated; evil Men, so long as the Murtherer lyes conceal'd, or in case he escapes the Law, are encouraged by his example to the like cruel and destructive Practices. This creates a diffidence in Men, makes them shy and distrustful of one anothers Society. Besides all this, Murther many times proves the Ruine of a worthy and useful Family, by taking off the Head, or lopping some or other of the more Hopeful and Flourishing Branches. All which Injuries do apparently tend to the dissolution of the Publick Peace and Security.

5. If we look to the Rice and Causes of this Sin, they are some of the greatest Vices which reproach and vilify

vilify Humane Nature. The most common and visible Causes of it are *Covetousness*, which is the root of all evil, and the Counter-part of Idolatry : Lust, the Mother of Shame : excessive Pride and Envy, which *resteth not, unless it causes some to* Pro. 4, 15. fall : a Cruel Desperate, Malicious, and Revengeful Temper, fermented with hellish Rage and Fury. Such are the Vices which prompt and irritate men to this Savage and unnatural Wickedness ; than which nothing is more contrary to the Spirit of the Gospel, which is all Kindness, Meekness, and Charity ; nothing more unlike the Temper of our Blessed Saviour, his gracious Design in coming into the World, his pacifick Doctrine and Example to it, and his most charitable and obliging manner of leaving it.

This is a true Indictment of the Sin of Murther, which shews it to be a Monstrous and most Hainous Crime : an Action entirely and extremely evil, with out the least shadow of a good Circumstance in it. For a Christian therefore, a Disciple

of the Cross, to be guilty of it, is under his own hand (the Fatal Instrument of this Horrid Fact) to Renounce all Right and Title to the Merits of him, who for our sakes suffered upon it.

And now, because the great enemy and deceiver of Mankind, who was himself *a Murtherer from the beginning*, has found out wayes to palliate the hainousness of this scarlet Crime, and betray Men into a presumption of the Lawfulness of it in some Cases,

Joh. 8, 44.

4. I shall, in the last place, more largely consider these two, *viz.* the Killing of another in a Quarrel of Honour; and putting an end to our own Lives, when we are grown weary of them.

1. Killing another upon a Challenge or Point of Honour, to satiate our Revenge, or to punish the Affronts and Injuries which he offers to us. I cannot seriously think, that any man, while he is himself, I mean, while he is under the Government of Reason and hearkens to the cool Dictates of it, do's really approve of this

this, as a lawful and worthy Action. But it is far more incredible, that a Profest Christian, that is competently instructed in the Doctrine of Christ, and Believes what he professes, should venture his Life and Salvation upon the credit of this Doctrine, That it is lawful to Kill the man that Affronts him. For unless we could hope to change the Natures of things, as easily as we do the Names of them, a voluntary taking away the Life of Man by a private hand, without Authority from God or his Ministers of Justice, is and will be the Sin of Murder to the Worlds End; And then it will be so, when we have drest it up with all the modish Names and flourish as we can put upon it. And the Killing an Adversary in a Duel, for a scurvy Word or a rude Action, will be one of the deepest Stains of Honour, and an Act of the highest Injustice to our Neighbour, if the breach of the sixth Commandment be so.

When all is said that can be, in favour of it, it is still a private Revenge upon the Life of Man, which

God has impaled and reserved to his own Use and Disposal : forbidding all Persons, but those that Rule in his stead, or may justly presume upon his or their Commission, in any Case to touch or Invade it ; And therefore to do it in Revenge of Honour, is a manifest violation of this Law : since neither God, nor the Magistrate, that bears his Authority, have made either of the contending Parties the dispensers of their Justice, but reserved the matter to their own Tribunals. So that here the Question is not, who gave the Affront of what Nature it was, or who sent the Challenge ? But the proper Questions are, who gave thee Power over thy Brother's Life ? Who prescribed his Heart-bloud as the only salve for thine Honour ? And who is the lawful Judge and Revenger of the wrong thou sustainest by him ? And if the matter be put upon this Issue, I may almost leave it to every mans Conscience to determine what the Verdict will be.

For a private Man to Revenge himself in any kind, is *Uti Jure alieno*
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to usurp another mans Right; which is always unjust : and then for one, in his station, to invade the most sacred Prerogative of his Prince to the destruction of his Subjects, must have all the degrees of Injury and Injustice in it, that can be easily imagined : Besides,

To come to the Plea of Honour, the Life of Man is infinitely too precious a thing to make Satisfaction for the little Affronts (and very little, God knows, they are many times) for which men challenge one another to Fight and Dye. It vastly exceeds all the Evil, which any man suffers by another in his good name. And surely, it is not like a Man of Honour, or indeed of common Justice and Equity, to insist upon a Satisfaction (as every one that engageth in a Duel do's) so extremely, in real Value , beyond the injury he suffers. And I verily think, I now speak the unfeigned sense of his own Mind, when he sees his Rival groveling in his Bloud, when he reflects upon the sad Trophies of his Killing Honour,

and has surfeited himself with his unnatural Revenge.

The Occasions of Duelling are observed, for the most part, to be either too small and bashful, or too shameful and reserv'd, to appear in a Court of Judicature; But let the Calumny be never so foul, or publick, or so maliciously contrived, Nothing stains like Blood: which consideration alone ought to Restrain every man, that is tender of his Honour or Salvation, from shedding it, upon the highest Provocation that can be given him.

But more than this, there are other ways of healing our Reputation, and living in brighter Fame than ever, in the esteem of the wisest and best Judges of Honour; *The Law is open*, let the Parties Implead one another: Or if they must be fighting, let thy King and thy Country bind the Lawrels of Victory about thy Head, or Embalme thy Memory. This is certainly more Honourable then to Kill the worst Man upon Earth in a private Quarrel, and makes the Case of Duelling extremely

extremely different from that of one mans Killing another, when he is forst upon it in his own Defence.

And after all, I hope, it is no Affront to be reminded that we are Christians: nor any diminution of Honour, to adhere to the Rules of our Holy Profession. Great Spirits, as they are better fitted than others for great and excellent things, so (as *Plato* observes) they are Subject to great Failings and Errours. They have commonly very quick and piercing Apprehensions, and are very lively in the management of the greatest and most difficult Affairs; but are not always so happy in their Memories, (if I may so express it) as to forget the Injuries that are offered them, in Imitation of him who forgave his Enemies, who forbid the drawing of the Sword in his own Quarrel, and expressly told his Disciples, that he came not to destroy Mens Lives, but to save them. And since the Son of God suffered the contradictions of Sinners, why should the Disciple aspire to be above his Master?

Αἱ μεγάλαι φύσεις
μεγάλας ἐκφέρουσιν
τὰς κακίας,

Luk. 9,

56.

ster? I am sure, to Act contrary to the Author of our Religion, looks as if we were ashamed of being thought his Disciples; And if we are not, we cannot think it too great a condescension, for his sake and our own. To consider,

1. That the Pretence of Honour in the present Case, is apparently contrary to the Honour of our Blessed Lord and Redeemer, and the Rules he has given us to live by; If we believe him to be the Son of God, we cannot deny, but his Laws are of much better Authority than any of those Rules of Honour, which some Men prescribe to themselves. Now our Saviour was so far from allowing men to Kill one another in a Quarrel, that he forbids all Quarrelling and Provocation in Word or Action; and Represents the Danger of those Liberties which men give to their Passions, tho' they proceed no farther than to Reproachful Language, to be no less than that of Hell-Fire. He also requires us to forgive our Brother, as often as he Offends; *And not to revenge our selves,*

*verse, 22.
of this Ch.*

*Mat. 18.
22,
Ro. 12. 19,*

selves, but to give place unto wrath ; and has taught us to Pray for Forgiveness at Gods hand, *as we forgive them that Trespass against us.* Unless therefore, to Kill be to forgive, and to break Christ's Commandments must go for honouring him, no Christian can engage with Honour in a single Combat : and I cannot Imagine with what Success he can hope to do it, while he Fight against Heaven and grapples with one, who, he knew is infinitely stronger than himself.

2. This is to fall greatly Short of the Righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, which our Saviour tells us (in the verse immediately before the Text) unless we *exceed*, we shall *in no Case enter into the Kingdom of Heaven.* These men (as I observed before) never denied, but that Killing a man, either in Hot or Cod Blood, without Publick Authority, was a Notorious Violation of God's Commandment. Nay to do this in Hot Blood, was in their opinion a Crime worthy of Death ; as is plain in the Case of *Barabbas*, who
by

by their Law was sentenc'd to dy,
Mark 15, at the time of our Saviour's Crucifixion, for committing *Murther in the Insurrection*. And accordingly there was no Dispute between our Saviour and the Jews concerning this meaning of the Law; And I heartily wish our fighting Gallants would consider, whose Followers they are, and whether they also do not prefer *Barabbas*, before *Jesus*, and under pretence of Revenging their own, lay his, with their own, Honour in the Dust.

3. For men to stake their Lives in a Duel, is to run the most desperate hazard; I mean, of dying in a Sin, which seldom allows a few moments to Repent of it; or of Killing another Person, it may be their old dear and confident Friend; and perhaps eternally, by cutting off his time of Repentance, and making his Peace with God. He that attempts to Kill his Brother, whether he Kills him or not, mortally hates him; for he would be the Death of him if he could, and then I fear, he Forfeits something more than his Honour

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Honour that attempts it, For St. John ¹ Job. 3. tells us, *He that hateth his Brother,* ^{15.} *is a Murtherer; and we know that no Murtherer hath eternall Life abiding in him.* And this being the Case of Duellers what a dreadful venture is it, to stake two precious Lives, and two Immortal Souls upon a mere imaginary point of Honour! If this be the Honour of Christians, whose Religion (as St. James describes it) Jam. 3. *is first pure, then peaceable, Gentle,* ^{17.} *and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without wrangling [ἀδύναμις] and without hypocrisy,* then let Light and Darknes embrace, and the plainest contradictions assume the Names of the brightest Reason and Truth.

And now, I hope, it is worthy of a serious thought, whether this be not enough to ballance the mighty pretence of Honour. I know it is commonly said, that a Gentleman and a Man of Honour, ought not to put up an Affront, when it is in his Power to Revenge it; But it is plain, that a Christian of the best Rank and Quality ought to do this; and that
great

great Men must be Judged by the Gospel, whether they will think fit to Live by it or not.

2. For the Case of Self-Murther, or casting away our own Lives when we are weary of them. If we look to the Reason of the Commandment, *Thou shalt not Kill*, viz. because every man bears the Image of God, it is as plain a violation of it to Kill our selves, as to Kill any other man. And since we are commanded to Love our Neighbour *as our selves*, and the Love of our selves is the Standard of our Love to him, it follows that we have as great Obligations to the full, to be tender of our own Lives, as of his; and therefore if it be Murther to Kill our Neighbour, it must be at least as great a crime to Kill our selves. Nay, in some respects it exceeds all the instances of Inhumanity and Vice, and transcends the most cruel and Crying Sins. For,

1. To Kill our selves is the most unnatural Murther that can be, if we consider how deeply the principle of Self-preservation is planted

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in our Nature: and that it is a Law in our Minds, teaching us to abhor the Destruction of our selves, and to take the best care we can to preserve our own Life and Being, there can be no such unnatural Murder as the putting of our selves to Death. There is no Natural Union in the World so dear and intimate as that of the Soul and Body; nor any that hath greater Interest depending upon it, both in reference to this and the Future State: And therefore nothing can be more contrary to the voice and dictate of Nature, than the wilful Destruction of it, by the same Person that is most nearly concerned to Preserve and Enjoy it.

2. It is, of any Sin, the most directly opposite to the saving condition of Repentance; which is a remedy for all other Sins, but this. Self-Murder is a Sin of that quick dispatch, and that desperate Nature, that it leaves a Man no time to Repent of it. We may be Guilty of many other Sins, and may live to Repent of them: But he that Murders himself, is sure to Dye in his Sin,

Sin, and to be hurried away in the Reek and Guilt of his own Bloud to the Tribunal of God, without allowing himself time to ask the forgiveness of it, or at least to purge his Conscience from so deep and indelible a stain as this.

And therefore, if we cannot be saved without Repentance, as the Gospel assures us we can not, he that Destroys his own Life cannot be saved according to the Gospel-Covenant, because he dyes in a Sin that cannot be Repented of. Tis true, God may have more Mercy for Sinners than he makes us acquainted with, (which may be just enough to keep our hopes alive at the Death of such Persons) but the Gospel being the last Revelation of the Grace of God, it is an infinite Presumption, in expectation of unrevealed Grace, to venture upon a Sin, which all the Grace and Truth that came by *Jesus Christ*, is too little to secure the Forgiveness of.

These are great Aggravations of the Sin of Self-Murder. And I fear, the excuses which are made for it will

will prove no better, since they all center in a high discontent at the Providence of God. No man offers to make away himself, that thinks himself well in this World: or that submits to the Troubles and Calamities which befall him, as coming from the just and overruling Hand of God. And for men to throw away their Lives in a Pet, and to grow so utterly weary of them that they cannot endure to live a few day's longer, or wait for Gods Permission to *Depart in peace*, is a very high Reflection upon the wisdom and goodness of his Providence: As if he had thrust them into a World that was not *fit for them* to live in, as if they knew better when, and how, to deliver themselves out of the Miseries of this Mortal Life, than he do's; As if God had no Regard to their Sufferings, or had left it to their discretion to leave the World, and discharge themselves from his Service when they pleas'd; or had not provided a better World to requit them for it: As if an *Eternal Weight of Glory* was not a sufficient

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Recompence for their Patience under the heaviest Afflictions of this present Life, which *are but for a Moment*. This is so false and insolent a Charge against the Providence of God, that it is enough to spoil the best-designed Action in the World, and therefore cannot excuse so bloody and unnatural an one, as Self-Murther is.

I shall close all with a caution or two concerning this desperate & unnatural Sin; and the rather, because it has been observed by those that have Travell'd into foreign Countries, that Self-Murther is far more common in this, than in any of the Nations about us.

I. First then, let us be very cautious of those Doctrines, which have occasion'd many, and some very serious Persons, to despair of the Mercy and goodness of God and in the Anguish of their Souls, to fling away themselves into the dreadful Abyss of Eternity. There is no ground, that I know of, from the Gospel to believe, that God had no good-will to any particular Man from Eternity, and much less to the far greater part of Mankind; or that the Generality
of

of Men are bound over to destruction with the Iron Chain of an Irrespective Decree ; or that Christ dyed to save but very few of those that are called by his Name. And methinks the effects which these, and the like Doctrins, have had upon Poor Melancholy Souls, should be no Arguments to recommend them to any serious and impartial Judgment. We ought to be very tender of narrowing the infinite Goodness of God, who would have all men to be Saved : Or laying the Damnation of Men upon any thing but their own wilful Opposition to the Grace and Goodness of God, which *leadeth to Repentance.*

2. It concerns us to be very cautious of all the methods and degrees of this Sin ; such as piercing our Hearts with worldly Cares, poisoning our Health and surfeiting our Bodies with Excess, and Dying the Martyrs of Intemperance or Lust. How many owe their Death to the Revels of a Night ? Drink away their reason, and drown themselves in Rivers of Wine ? Game high, and when they have lost their Money, or engaged their Estates, or

Honours, sell their Lives to Redeem them? These Men do as certainly Kill themselves, and very often as suddenly too, as he that strangles himself, or sheaths the Fatal Poy-niard in his sobbing and despairing Breast. And is not this to *Dye as a fool Dyes*? without any consideration of the Life he has led, or of the Everlasting State he is launching into!

What man, that is not fond of Destruction, and in love with Misery, would venter his Life and Soul upon such hazards as these? Were there no other Life than this, a prudent Man would not be prodigal of it; but to throw it away at one Cast, or to stake it against the Pleasure of a Debauch, when all Eternity depends upon it, is an astonishing instance of the Madness of Folly.

Dent. 32.
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Oh that men were Wise! that they understood this! that they would consider their latter end! That in kindness to their Souls, which must live forever, they would frequently entertain themselves with the serious thoughts of Death, and Judgment,
Eter-

Eternal Happiness and Misery: and not suffer their Lusts and Vices to hurry them out of this World, before they have any reasonable hopes of a better, or have made any tolerable preparation for it.

There is infinite odds between a State of Hope in this Life, and of endless Dispair and Misery in the next, *where the worm dyeth not, and the Fire is not quenched.* And then what a desperate thing is it to cast away our Lives, when all our hopes & interests in both Worlds do depend upon them? This is so wild and extravagant an Action, so contrary to all the dictates of Sense and Reason, to the Rules of our Faith, and the foundation of our Hopes, to the very end of our Creation, the Honour and Goodness of the Divine Providence, and that eternal desire of Happiness, which is inseparable from the Constitution of every rational Being, that there seems to be a principle wanting in humane Nature to account for it. And can we be so monstrous and unnatural, as to break thro' all the restraints of Humanity & Religion, and comply with the instigation

of the devil to destroy ourselves, rather than submit to the wise method of God to save us? Shall we Massacre our Souls and Bodies, which the Son of God did not think his own Life too dear a Sacrifice for? Shall we deprive our selves of all advantages for securing Eternal Life, to gratify a Passion that never pretended to the least degree of Pleasure or Satisfaction in it.

Let us make all the hast we can to qualify our selves for the Glory and Happiness of the Future State, there is no fear our time should lye upon our hands: Death, without our assistance, will soon take it off and Eternity will require and deserve the utmost preparation we can possibly make for it. Let us therefore be wise, and since through the Grace of God we may live and be happy, and weather out the stormes of this angry and tempestious World; let us *possess our Souls with Patience*, and value our Lives as one of the choicest Blessings of Heaven, and not *Judge our selves unworthy of Eternal Life*, by refusing to wait for it *all the days of our appointed time till our change cometh.*

SERMON VIII.

Concerning the Shortness and Instability of Life.

James 4. 14.

*For what is your Life? It is even a
Vapour that appeareth for a little
time, and then vanisheth away.*

THE Apostle in the Verse before the Text expostulates with a sort of Proling and busy Men, that were laying a long train of Designs to raise their Fortunes in the World, without taking any notice of God's Providence, or asking his leave to thrive and be happy; Go too now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a City, and

Verf. 13. continue there a Year, and Buy and Sell, and get Gain. As if he had said, don't Reckon to fast ; You are sure of nothing that you Count upon, nor consider in whose hand your Life is, or on whose Pleasure your fine Projects depend. You reckon as if you were absolute Lords of Time ; and had the World in a String, and could draw the Wealth and Traffick of it into your own Hands as you Please. You talk of great Matters, and are very Free of what is none of your own, while you dispose of a Year to come : as if you knew the just Number of your Days, and were sure your Lives would hold out as long as you have occasion for them ; *Whereas you know*

Verf. 14. not what shall be on the Morrow, Or what a day may bring forth. You may Sicken and Die, before to morrow comes : Or you may finish your Journey, and Breath your last in the next Village, before you come to the City where your Designs are laid : For what is your Life ? It is even a Vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.

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These Words are a lively and emphatical Description of the frailty and shortness of Humane Life. The Question, *What is your Life?* as St. James seems to propose it, to take down the confidence of presumptuous Men, implies it to be next to nothing, a thing not at all to be Trusted or Relied upon: *Alas what is your Life?* And the answer lessens it as much: *It is a Vapour*, a thin vagrant Fume or Flash, that rather appears, than subsists, and that but *for a little time and then vanisheth away*; that is, It presently sinks into that Nothing (as to this World) which, while it appear'd, it was so little rais'd above.

But the Life of Man in this World, as vain and short as it is, deserves his most serious Thoughts, because there lies a mighty Weight upon it: no less than the concernment of a whole Eternity; And therefore the Shortness and Fickleness of it, are so far from excusing a careless manner of Living, or Prompting us to Mirth and Jollity, as the onely Remedy against them, that they are very weighty

weighty considerations to quicken our preparations for a better Life; and to excite us to the Well spending of this, since there is an Eternity to be gained or lost by the good or ill management of it.

Our great hindrance to this Duty is, that we are very apt to misreckon our Lives, being willing to Believe they will last as long as we can invent Business for them, or Hope to find any Pleasure in them. And for this Reason we need to be often Reminded of the shortness and instability of our Lives; For so many Years as we Reckon upon more than we have to Live. We Borrow upon the Interest of the next Life, and are therefore like to pay dearly for them, and especially since we can never enjoy them. We shall Live indeed to Eternity, but our stay here will be short: and yet what we do for Eternity, must be done here in this World; and therefore it behoves us to take a right Measure of our present Being, and not think that our Lives will stretch, as our Fancies and Desires of Living do.

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For tis plain, that the Stronger our Hopes of Life are, and the more Years we Reckon we have before us, the greater our Temptations will be to put off the main and necessary Work of our Lives, and to run the hazard of a too late and fallacious Repentance: of being *Hardened by the Deceitfulness of Sin*, and of falling at last into the ravings and distractions of Dying Sinners, the sad presages of a miserable Eternity. This we have often seen the Tryal of in Others, with that Ill Success, that of all things methinks we should not desire to make the Experiment: which yet we cannot avoid, if we do as they have done before us, and suffer our selves to be Gull'd with the Flatteries of this present World into a Fond expectation of a long and happy continuance here. The surest way to avoid the consequences of this Fatal Error, is to Understand the true State of our Lives, and to season our Minds with frequent and serious Meditations upon it, that so we may apply them to the proper and great ends of
Living

Living. To assist you herein I shall do these two Things :

1. I shall remind you of this certain and important Truth, That the Life of Man in this World is very short and transitory ; And then,

2. Shew you what Practical Inferences may be Drawn from the consideration of the shortness and instability of our Lives.

1. The Life of Man in this World is very short and Transitory. This is matter of sense, and one of the most obvious Truths that ever Nature or Experience taught us. The Grave, every time it opens its mouth gives us a sensible Demonstration of it ; It shews us of what Mold we are made, what we are, and what we must shortly be. As soon as the vigour and gaiety of Youth are gone, before we come to the borders of Old-age we many times grow sensible of the the Decays of this drooping Life, and begin to feel our selves Wearing and Dying ; And still the longer we live and the wiser and fitter we are to pass our Judgment upon things, the more Apprehensive we are of the short-

shortness and fallacy of Life. Our first years indeed seem to pass slowly on, because they are the years of discipline, of curbing our Phantries, and correcting our Errours: we are then commonly very eager in pursuit of Vanity, and we often meet with stops and interruptions in it from our Tutors and Governors: and this makes us almost think that our time stands still the while, and we shall never be our own Men, *i. e.* have the command of our time, and the liberty to squander and throw it away as we please. But when once we have past the age of discipline, have had some experience of Life, and lived long enough to reflect upon the first Stage of it, we certainly see our mistake, and chide time no more for not mending its speed, and passing away so heavily from us. When we look upon the reverse of our Lives, upon the years that are past, we have almost nothing left in view but the greater Sins and Follies we committed in them. Then, they appear but as a few days: then we are apt enough to say, how soon are

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Twenty or Thirty years fled and gone? How insensibly are they slip away? And were we to live twice as many more the Case would be the very same: and as soon as they are gone, we should be at our old complaint again, that our time in this World is very short, and be ready to say with good Old *Jacob*, (when he had lived neare twice as long as the Long-livers of our days generally
Gen. 47. 9. Few and evil have the days of the life do) of my Pilgrimage been.

When we come to the use of our reason, and begin to look abroad into the World, to observe the Monuments, and peruse the Annals and Histories of ancient times, we miss all the Generations of Men that peopled the World in former Ages. *Our Fathers, where are they? and the Prophets, do they live for ever?* Where are all the Founders and Inhabitants of ancient Kingdoms? all the Great Princes and Philosophers? the Shrewd Politicians, the Mighty Generals, and the Numerous Armies? the Wise and the Foolish, the Holy and Profane? All that ever Lived and Breath-
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ed till this present Age? Is there none left to Answer the Question? Then considering the Age of the World at this day, and the many Successions of Men that have been before us, there is Nothing more Demonstrable, than that the Days of Men are few upon the Earth.

One Generation passeth away, and another Generation cometh; We are always upon the Remove, making Room for our Successors, and for new Scenes of Providence, which wait for our Departure out of this World, and the Coming of a better or a worse Generation into it. We have but a short Part to Act, and when that is done, we must clear the Stage, and give Place to those that are Coming after Us, because a short Work will the Lord make upon the Earth. *Eccles. i. 4.* *Rom. 9. 28.*

God has set us our Bounds which we cannot Pass; and he has set them so near us, that it is strange we should Overlook them, or Dream of an Immortality here, while they stand so fairly in our View. *The days of our Years* (saith the Psalmist)

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are threescore Years and ten : and if by reason of Strength, they be fourscore Years, yet is their Strength, Labour and Sorrow : for it is soon cut off, and we fly away. Psal. 90. 10. This was a mighty Fall, from the Age of the Patriarchs, before the Flood : after which the Life of Man shorten'd apace, till it came so low as Seventy or Eighty Years, which is now the ordinary Measure ; and probably was so ever since the Murmuring of the *Israelites* in the Wilderness, at the Relation which the Spies brought them of the Land of Promise.

But when the *Psalmist* tells us, that our Age is reduced to threescore and ten or fourscore Years, we must not presently Reckon that so many Years will come to our shares. We cannot promise our selves another day, for *we know not what shall be on the morrow* ; and therefore can make no certain Reckoning of it. All the time we can call our own, is that which we have lived already ; So much God has given us, and so much we must answer for, and we can-

cannot be sure that he will give us a day more :

*Nemo tam Divos habuit faventes
Crastinum ut sibi possit polliceri.*

Some are gone in a moment, from the Cradle to the Grave ; and very many before they understand the consequence of Life and Death : we Die many times when we think of nothing less, in the flower and vigour of our Age, before we have any Symptoms of Death upon us. But because some there are that rub on to threescore and ten, or fourscore Years, and very few that exceed them, seventy or eighty Years (at a moderate computation) may well pass for the utmost Period of our Lives. This we generally esteem a full Age, and yet when we Draw towards it, are ready to complain of the scantiness and shortness of it. And if we think it short when we see it drawn out to its utmost length, what are we to Judge of it, when it is cut shorter by forty or fifty Years than the ordinary Measure ? What is the life of Children, who Die hanging

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at their Mothers Breasts? How short is the Race of young Men, who expire while their Blood boils in their Veins, and yet have as deep an interest in Eternity, as the longest Livers upon Earth? But since the longest Life, by our own Confession, is short, I need not ask how little the shortest is to be accounted of.

But you will say then, what need is there of this Discourse? Why must we be taught a Truth, which we are ready to Seal with our Tears, and every time we contemplate upon, do sadly bewail the certainty of? I answer, Tho' it is evident that our Lives are short, and we all pretend to know it, yet it is certain that our Memories are short too; and that our fondness of this World is such that we are apt to Forget where we are, upon what Terms we are here, how suddenly we must Remove, and what is Requisite to procure us a safe and easy Passage into that Eternal World, where we must dwell in perfect Bliss or Anguish for ever. We are so much enamour'd with this present

sent World, that, like Passionate Lovers, we seem not to remember what we say or do while we are conversing with it; It fetters our Memories, while it captivates our Affections: And while it subdues our Hearts, it bereaves us of the best use of our Reason, which certainly is to *set our affections on Things Above*, where we hope e're long to be: *And not on Things on the Earth*, where (were it worth our while) we are sure we cannot stay long to enjoy them.

This is our great Unhappiness: It is the inordinate love of this World that makes us forget our selves, and the design of our Creator in sending us hither; And the proper Remedy against it, is to keep our Minds as much awake as we can, with frequent and serious Thoughts, on the suddenness of our Departure hence. For it is not being of the opinion that our Lives are short, when we hear a Discourse about it, or follow a hearty Man to his Grave, that will cure us of our Doting on present Things; Nothing less will

Your sister

Concerning the Shortness

do this than a quick and lasting Sense of the shortness and uncertainty of our Lives. The power of Conviction lasts no longer than it is present to the Mind, or become habitual and familiar to it : as appears by the vanishing of those solemn Vows, which Men commonly make in their Sickness, (and which nothing else could extort from them) as soon as the Danger is over, and they begin to flatter themselves with new Hopes, of a long and pleasant Life.

And therefore as Melancholy a Thought as it is, that our Lives are short, besides that it is never unseasonable, it is one of the most useful Thoughts that we can carry about us. For it is certain, we can never overcome this flattering and enchanting World without it, and then we can never arrive to the Glory and Happiness of that to come. As Cold a Truth as it is, that we must shortly Dye, and leave this delicious World, it will mightily help to quicken our Devotions, and inflame our Affections to Heavenly things ; It will thereby prevent a
World

World of Sin and Folly : It will excite us to hasten our Repentance, to make the best of our little Life, and improve all advantages we hold by it, for a Blessed Eternity. And for these Reasons, the Scripture often recommends this serious Meditation to us : And to keep it fresh in our Memories, presents us with great variety of affecting Emblems, and lively Representations of the shortness and uncertainty of Humane Life : Such as are most obvious to our Senses, and apt to raise a new Passion in our Minds, every time we think of them. For instance,

1. Our Life is compared in Scripture to things of the most transitory and fading Nature. St. James calls it a *Vapour that appears for a little time, and then vanisheth away*. Such is the Life of Mortal Men, even the Greatest and Gallantest of them : It is up & down in a moment : It is a Vapour very often in the civil, as well as in the natural sense ; and commonly the greater Ostentation it makes, the sooner it disappears and is gone, and the Eye that saw

it sees it no more. And on the same account it is compared to a Shadow, 1 Chron. 29. 15. and to the Grass and Flower of the Fields for its weak and fading Nature, Psalm 103. 15, 16, Vers. As for Man, his Days are as Grass: as a Flower of the Field, so he flourisheth; for the Wind passeth over it, and it is gone, and the place thereof shall know it no more. So Job 14. 1, 2. Man, that is born of a Woman, is of few Days, and full of Trouble: he cometh forth like a Flower, and is cut down: he fleeth also as a shadow and continueth not.

2. The shortness of Humane Life is represented by things that are smallest in number and extension in their Kinds. Thus the days of
 Job 7. 1. Man are said to be like the Days of an Hireling: Which are few and precarious in comparison of those which the Children of the Family enjoy in their Fathers House; as our Saviour himself observes, The Servant
 John 8. 35. abideth not in the House for ever, but the Son abideth for ever. And so the Psalmist measures the Life of Man by the breadth of his hand, which

which bears no proportion to the vast circumference of the Earth, or Heavens: Behold (saith he) *Thou hast made my days as an Hand-breath*; Thou hast enclosed my Life in a very narrow Compass: And then he adds, as if he had spoken too lavishly of it, and *mine Age is as nothing before thee*: A mere cypher or nullity, if compared to thy Eternal Duration; Whereupon he concludes, *verily every Man at his best Estate is altogether Vanity.* Psal. 39, 6.

3. Our Life is also compared to things of the speediest and swiftest Motion, to remind us that it is Hastening away apace, and will be too nimble for us, if we delay the proper Work and Business which God hath assign'd us in this World: *My Days (saith Job) are swifter than a Weavers shuttle*: Oh remember that *my Life is Wind*. We read in Scripture of *the Wings of the Wind*, which denote the wonderful swiftness of it; And such is our Life: It is always upon the Wing: It makes all possible hast to be gone; It keeps pace with the Wings of the

Wind: *It is a Wind* (saith the Psal-
 mist) *that passeth away, and cometh*
not again. Our time is ever in mo-
 tion, and always keeps the same
 speed, what ever we are doing the
 while. And since we have but a lit-
 tle time, and that little (however
 spent) is always lessening and draw-
 ing to a Period, it cannot be long
 e're the whole stock be exhausted,
 tho' we should Husband it to the
 best advantage, and live out (which
 perhaps not one of a thousand do's)
 to the utmost stretch and possibility
 of Living.

4. The shortness and instability
 of this present Life is set forth by al-
 lusions to things which are moveable
 at Pleasure: Implying, that as short
 as the ordinary Term of Life is, it is
 always subject to the Providence of
 God, and often lessened by him in
whose Hands our Times are. In this
 respect our Life is compared to a
Shepherd's Tent, and our Bodies to *Ta-
 bernacles*, i. e. Extempore Houses or
 Receptracles, that are presently set
 up and taken down, or removed at
 the Pleasure of the Owner. And in
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this Language *Hezekiah* complains upon the sad tidings the Prophet brought him of his approaching Death, *Isa. 38. v. 10, 12. I am deprived of the Residue of my Tears: Mine Age is departed, and is removed from me, as a Shepherd's Tent; And* this he immediately ascribes to the special Hand of God, the Sovereign Lord of Life and Death: *He will cut me off with Pining Sicknes, from Day even to Night, thou wilt make an end of me.* Thus also our Bodies are styled *Tabernacles*, which are no durable Habitations, no certain Dwelling-places; The Spirit that lodges within them knows they were never designed for its constant Abode and Residence: *Knowing (saith S. Peter) that shortly I must put off this my Tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me.* We know these Sorry Tenements cannot stand long: We cannot tell how soon we may be Devested of these Earthly Bodies: but when Death comes to undress us, we certainly put them off, and very often before they are worn out with Age, or are almost ever the worse for Wearing.

2Pet. 1. 14.

Wearing. We have no lease of our Lives, but are every day liable to a Discharge: For tho' God hath set us a Term that we cannot pass, yet he hath left it in his own Power to cut off as much of it as he Pleases, and accordingly our Lives are frequently much shorter than the common Measure.

*Job, 20. 8.
Psal. 73. 20*

5. The Life of Man is so very frail and short, that it is resembled to the vainest and most insignificant Things. In Scripture it is said to flee away as a Dream, a meer Delusion of the Fancy, which vanishes at the chase of a waking Thought, and is nothing but Ramble and Contradiction when the Mind recovers the scatter'd Ideas of it. The Psalmist also compares it to the Telling of a Story, *Ps. 90. 9. We bring our Years to an End, as it were a Tale that is Told.* As we are talking and jesting Death intrudes into our Company, and our Life is gone in a Trice, *Adito Citius*, before we can bring out the saying we were upon; or as some Paraphrase the Words according to the Arabic Version, our Years are reputed as a Spi-

Spiders Web, whose curious Frame and Contexture signifies nothing to its own preservation, having no strength or solidity to support it.

By such familiar Emblems as these do's the Spirit of God, in whom, we live, breath, and have our beings, admonish us of (what we are very apt to Forget) the frailty and uncertainty of this present Life. And this it do's to cure us of our Heat and Passion for this World, and the great Vanity of reckoning upon time to come, which at present we are sure is none of ours, and perhaps never shall be ; and to excite and quicken us to secure our everlasting Interests, and to take care of the whole compass of our Beings, of which the longest Life in this World is a very small and inconsiderable portion. And as this shews the great concernment of our Creator for our well-being and happiness, so it is reasonable to think that the thoughts of it should stir and affect our Minds : and that while we are here we have but a short time to live, we should be willing to understand the best way of Living and Dying, of
making

making a good hand of this present Life, and of ordering our Steps as behoves those that Tread upon the Brink of Eternity.

I come now to the Second Thing proposed, which was to shew what practical Inferences may be drawn from the consideration of the shortness and instability of our Lives. And as unpleasant as this Argument is, if we will but deal faithfully with our selves, & impartially weigh the consequences of it, I doubt not but we may learn a great deal of Wisdom from it, both for the regulation of our Lives, and reconciling our Minds to the shortness of them.

First then, we should hence learn to lay aside all expectation of meeting with true and real Happiness in this World. For true Happiness is the most constant and durable thing that can be : And then we may be sure that the Happiness of this World, from which we must part so soon, and without which we must live a whole Eternity in the Other, is not true and proper Happiness.

We come into this World to conquer,

quer, not to court or enjoy it; so long as we are conversant with it, and lye upon its border's, it will be always tempting and troubling us: ever and anon presenting us with new occasions of shewing our virtue, and improving our conquest over it; and till we have compleated our Victory, we cannot expect our Triumph. And it is well for us that our Triumph is not assign'd us in this World, where the greenest Laurels do quickly Fade, and the Head that wears them is soon laid in the Dust. Now let us digest this Principle well, that this Life is not a State of Rest and Happiness, and it will surely cool our Affections to the present World, and save us a great deal of trouble and vexation in persuing the Vanities of it: for, that is the proper Name of things, which appear but for a little time, and then vanish away. | And this is a good step towards a discovery of the Place and Nature of Happiness, and engaging our Minds in the Prosecution of it. | Here it is not to be found, and therefore I must seek for it

it in the next World, where I shall dwell for ever, and where all things are firm and everlasting. And since it lyes not in fading Pleasures, or in any of the perishing delights of sense, I will look for it in things of a better and more permanent Nature, in Spiritual and Divine Enjoyments; I will expect my happiness in Heaven only as the place, and in God as the Fountain of it. And let the World smile at me for this (as it is like it will:) my Life will be suddenly gone, and 'tis my Interest to make the best of it that I can, and much better to be jear'd into Happiness, than decoy'd into Misery.

Thus, as the Shortness of our Lives is a plain Argument that we are not capable of being truly Happy in this World, so the serious consideration of it will both lessen our esteem of its Delights and Treasures, and strongly move us to aspire after a more lasting and blessed State. And this was it that made those excellent Men (*Hebr. 11, 16.*) who confessed that they were Strangers and Pilgrims on the Earth (here to day, and to mor-

row gone to their Everlasting home) despite this Worlds transitory Glory, and desire a better Country, that is an Heavenly; a more assured and enduring State, a place of undisturbed Rest and Joy, of endless and never-fading Happiness.

2. The consideration of the shortness and uncertainty of our Lives, should silence our complaints, and comfort us under the greatest Evils and Troubles that are incident to us in this World. The Miseries of this present Life; besides, that they are Checquer'd with innumerable Mercies, cannot be very great, because they must be short, and a little time and patience will ease us of them.

Many of them (are but *Umbra Malorum*, as *Seneca* calls them,) mere shadows and appearances of Evil, such as we apprehend in our Dreams when our Fancies are troubled, and when we awake have no real Mischiefs or Terror in them. And such are our Wants of all the unnecessary things of this Life; we fancy we should live more pleasantly, if we had more Estate, or more Power and

and Applause in the World; and it may be, we should live worse than we do, and not so long as we may do without them: For we see that few Men that have them, have virtue enough to make a good Use of them, and that the Estate and the Owner do very often help to Ruine one another. And for those Afflictions which are real, and we cannot but feel the smart and inconvenience of such, as Sicknes, Pain, Ignominy and Oppression; if they are moderate, they are worth a Complaint: if excessive and insupportable, they cannot last long without mixtures of Ease and Comfort, because we cannot bear them long. The sharper they are, the sooner will they cut our way through them, and let in Death to release us from them.

And this comfort we have from the shortness of our Lives, that there is a sure Remedy at hand against all our Maladies, against all the diseases we contract in this unwholsom Climate, and the inconvenience we endure in this troublesom and uneasy World. Must I shortly Dye? Why then

then I shall quickly have ease, and in a little time shall never be Sick more ; after that, I shall no more complain of restless Nights and tiresome Days: I shall Sleep securely under the clods of the Valley, and never mind what the busy and ungoverned Rout, or the Malicious and Censorious World will be saying of me, I shall no more be grieved with Oppression, or pinched with Want, or stung with Reproaches, or disturbed by the Folly and Madness of the people. The Grave is a Sanctuary: *There the Wicked* (saith Job) *cease from troubling,* ^{Job 3. 17,} *and there the weary are at Rest; There the Prisoners rest together: they hear not the Voice of the Oppressor; the small and the great are there, and the* ^{18, 19.} *Servant is free from his Master.* The poor Man lyes as easily in his Grave, and wants as little there as the Monarch on his Throne. And considering how full of trouble and disquiet the Life of Man is, its Happy for us that we have not far to go to our Graves, where we may Bury all our Grievs, and be eased of every thing that is cross and burthen some to us

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in this World. Since *all the days of*
Prov. 15. the afflicted are evil. Why should
 15. they repine that they are no more?

[Why should the Mariner, that is embarked in a crazy Vessel, amongst the Rocks and Pirates, be troubled that the Haven is near? 'Twas a noble Answer that the *Spartans* returned to King *Philip* of *Macedon*, when he threatned to distress them, He cannot hinder us from Dying. Death will give us a Writ of Ease in spite of the Angry Tyrant; and if we take care to live well, we may be glad to be dispatcht out of the storms and hurricanes of this threatening and tempestuous World.

3. Since our Lives are very short we see what a fair proposal God is pleased to make us, when he promises Eternal Life upon the spending of these short Lives in his Service. What greater offer can we desire? Or what better Advantage could we hope to make of our time, if it were at our own disposal, and there lay no other obligation upon us to employ it in God's Service? We cannot but say, that Religion teaches us to make the best use of our time, because it teaches

teaches us to live like Men, in a due subordination to our Maker, and to do the best things for the World, and for selves, which is the Glory and Perfection of our Nature. But suppose, it were possible for us to be discharged from this Obligation to a Life of Virtue and Religion, or that we might safely break it without drawing the displeasure of God upon us, yet since Heaven is Promised us upon this condition, that we live *soberly, Righteously and Godly*, for the little time we have to spend in this World, how is it Possible that we should refuse it, when we have the prospect of so glorious a Reward, and may be sure to be completely Happy ever after? Again, suppose Religion had no Temporal Promises to invite us to it, and (which is the utmost that was ever Pretended against it) suppose it were a tiresome thing to spend our lives in the Service of God, and to be tyed up from the liberties which humane Nature so strongly desires, yet surely when Eternal Joys are set before us, we may well endure the uneasiness of it, and chearfully dispence with a

short trouble to possess our selves of Pleasures for evermore. Alas, what is this little Flash of Life, when thou look st into a vast Eternity, and are invited into a State, of endless Bliss and Glory? When it is almost spent, we generally complain that it is quickly gone; and they that have spent it best, are best pleased with themselves, and are only troubled that they have not spent it better; and if they had a hundred lives more they would not chuse to spend one of them in the Service of Sin, or on any account to want the comfort and Satisfaction which they find in serving and pleasing God. Many of them have thought Heaven a cheap Bargain at the Price of Martyrdom and Persecution, and gladly embrac't a Stake, rather than enjoy *the Pleasures of Sin for a season*. And certainly the testimony of good Men, who have made Religion the business of their lives, is far more credible than theirs, that never had the Patience to examine its Principles, or to make any competent Tryal of them.

Besides this, if we subtract all that time which God allows us to provide

provide for our selves and Families, to refresh our Bodies with Food and Rest, and other lawful Diversions, to serve and enjoy our Friends, and exchange good Offices with our Neighbours and Acquaintance, which for the most part passes away pleasantly enough with us, the remainder of our Life is so small, that we may be ashamed to grutch the Devoting of it to our great Benefactor, at whose pleasure it is whether we shall live a moment or not. After all, were the Duties of Religion every where as sharp and difficult as some men esteem them, yet surely they are much easier than Eternal Torments, and it is nothing so irksom to serve God, as it is to be damned; and if we think so, we cannot but allow that the spending a few years in his Service, tho' it should prove a Pennance to us, since we may both escape the Damnation of Hell, and enjoy the Happiness of Heaven by it, is so fair a demand; that nothing can ever excuse the refusal of it.

4. The shortness and instability of our lives should teach us to moderate

our Cares about earthly things, and submit all our designs and purposes to God's good Pleasure and Providence over us. 'Tis a strange Absurdity, which the over-busie and designing Men of this World are Guilty of, that they love it better than their lives, tho' all their enjoyment of it depends upon them. They complain that their lives are short, and yet sell them very cheap to purchase a little Estate or Honour; and wear them out much faster than they need to do, by immoderate Toyl and Labor, only to have a Name for leaving something behind them. To Dy Rich, they Kill themselves with piercing and vexatious Cares, and have hardly the wisdom of the Fool in the Gospel, to ease and refresh their Souls, tho' they have *goods laid up for many years*, and scarce know where, or on whom to bestow them. And methinks of all Persons, such Men should not Tax the Providence of God, for allowing them so short a time in this World, since they take so much pains to shorten it themselves, and cannot afford to live out the time which God and Nature have allowed them. On
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the other hand, where is the wisdom, seeing our lives are so short, of laying a long Train of Designs reaching into Future Ages, and promising our selves success upon any little encouragement from the present Posture of Affairs, when it is impossible we should live to see, or be competently assured of the conclusion of them? Who that reads *Campanella's* Discourse concerning the *Spanish* Monarchy, can forbear to smile at the simplicity, or admire the confidence of crowing Mortals, who undertake to govern the World in future Times, and instruct the Providence of God how to demean it self in relation to them? 'Tis too much for a mortal Man to undertake for the events of a single day; 'tis very unreasonable for him to trouble himself and the World with Projects which are never like to take effect in his days, and nothing is more absurd; than to brag what great things he will do at such a time, which it may be, proves to be Ten or Twenty years after he is gone to his Grave.

St. *James* having to do with such men, teaches them (immediately

after the Text) to exprefs themselves in a more Modest and Christian Style: *For that* (saith he) *ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this or that.* Since your Projects depend upon your Lives, and your Lives upon God, you will do well to take him into your Counsels, and propose none but reasonable and moderate things, always submitting your selves and them to his Wisdom and Conduct: to leave Future Time and Events to God's over-ruling Providence to do your present Duties, and not interest your selves in the World any farther than you may be serviceable to it.

5. The Consideration of the shortness of our Lives, and the great instability of them; should engage the youngest of us to begin them well, and to use all the care and Frugality that they can in the spending of them, least they should not hold out for the great purposes of Living. While we are young we are as capable of Virtue and Religion, of Dying, and going to Heaven, as when we are Old. All these things are necessary to our Happiness, and as much
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our concernment now, as ever they will be ; all the difference is, that Youth is the best, and perhaps the only opportunity that a young Man will ever have of being good and happy. Old-Age is no necessary part of Humane Life ; there are more that Dy young, than that Live to be Old ; and of those that do so, there are few that live well, that did not begin to live betimes ; I mean, that had not an early sense of God and Religion.

Consider therefore, you that are young, how much it concerns you to make Religion your first and immediate care, if you would aim to do the most necessary and important Work of your Lives to the best advantage. You will be sure to escape two mighty Hazards by it : *viz.* The Danger of Dying Young, which is over when you are fitted for Heaven by an early Piety : And that of deferring your Repentance till you are Old, or you know not when ; which seldom comes to any Thing, or at most but to a deep and piercing Sorrow that you did not Repent sooner, when you had Life and Quickness of Thought, Opportunity and Ability
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of serving God, and laying a good and lasting Foundation for Eternal Life. And then by consecrating your green and blooming Years to the Service of God, you will have the advantage of making the most of a short Life; You will soon find the ways of Religion pleasant, and the pleasantness of them will engage you to Persevere to the End, which will be everlasting Life, and Pleasure for evermore. [By setting out early towards Heaven, and taking the morning of your Days, you will find it a much easier Journey than they generally do, who thinking to Ride it off in a few hours in the Evening, are soon benighted and forc't to Travel without any certain Guide or Light, till they stumble into a Dark Grave, and a doubtful Immortality. And should you live but to a competent Age, yet beginning Young, and making the best Improvement of your short Time, you may do very great and eminent Things for God's Honour and your Own, and the good of Humane Society; For your Comfort in this, and your Happiness in the other World; And so may live
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more in your little time, than they that live longer by many Years, than the late Evening Convert, or the Sinner that is an hundred Years Old. For indeed we are not properly said to Live, till we are alive to God and our Redeemer, and begin to look towards Heaven and Eternity, which are the proper and great Ends of Living. And therefore, if we would make the best of our Time, as we had need to do that have so little in Store. We must begin at the right End, and Engage betimes in the Service of God, and not think it enough, when we have spent the Flower of our Age upon His and our own greatest Enemy, to put him off with a few of our blasted and wither'd Days, *in which we have no Pleasure*, and can have no Reason to think they should be acceptable to Him. And for the same Reason, it concerns us, having begun well, to hold on in the ways of Vertue and Piety, and to get as forward as we can towards Heaven in the next Stage of our Lives; remembering that our Lives are now shorter than they were, and that our Time is every day more precious than other,

other, the value of it improving as the Stock Decreases : That nothing less than our Progress in Well-doing can secure our hopeful beginnings : That every good Work we do, will both help to insure and enhance our Reward ; and that the true Way of lengthening our Time, is to Live it all, and apply it to the uses of a Blessed Eternity.

6. Lastly, This should admonish those, that in a Course of Nature are drawing near a Conclusion of their Lives, and have been long entangled in the Affairs and Business of this World, to hasten their Preparation for a Better. Such Persons need not be taught, that having lived fifty or threescore Years already, their Lives are shorter than they were by so many Years, and therefore in Reason they cannot think to live many more : and then, it is to be Hoped, the little Time that is left is not too much for Heaven. If we think it is, I cannot imagine with what confidence we can entertain any Hopes of going thither : And if we think not, why do we not follow our own Convictions, strike off immediately from

from this World; and gain all the Time and advantage that we can to Purify our selves from all Pollution of Flesh and Spirit, to Adorn and Beautify our Souls with Divine Virtues and Graces, and qualify them for the blest Society of God, and the glorious Spirits that are about his Throne?

We have lived to little purpose, if all this while we are not sensible of the Vanity and Fallacy of this World, and must have very mean apprehensions of Celestial Bliss and Happiness, if we can but so much as desire to live always here; However it do's not lie at our choice; We may choose whether we will be Happy or Miserable in the other World, but thither we must go, and one of the two we must certainly be: And since we are so far upon our Way, it highly concerns us, if we make Heaven our Option (and it is strange if we should not) to be very quick and serious in our Preparations for it. ✕

They that have lost all, or the best part of their Time, have none to lose now, unless they will lose all Eternity with it. And for those that have met with

with great interruptions in their Christian Course, having been hurried up and down by the Affairs and Business of this World, it behoves them to get out of the Noise and Bustle of it, so soon as ever they can, and to redeem the precious Hours and Opportunities they have lost of serving God, and laying up their Treasures in Heaven, tho' they should Dye some hundreds the poorer for it. | For surely the next Life is of far greater concernment than this, and therefore it becomes the best Men, when they have had their share of the Trouble and Business of this World, and have enough to carry them through it, to retire as fast as they can, not merily to enjoy their Ease, but as the Apostle speaks in another Case, *πρὸς τὸ ἐυσχημον καὶ εὐπρόσδεον τῷ κυρίῳ ἀπερισπάσως*, that in a Fitting and Decent manner they may *attend* upon the Service of God, and mind the Work and Business of the next World *without distraction*. 'Tis very unseemly to see Men, that have more than enough for this, and pretend to live upon the Faith and Hope of another World, pursuing Riches and Ho-

1 Cor. 7. 35.

Honours to the very brink of the Grave, and Gasping after Preferments, almost with their Dying Breath.

Men that Traffick in a Forreign-Land, have generally the Wisdom to withdraw their Effects, when they are leaving the Country, and returning to their Native Soil. And 'tis *✱* said of the Holy Men, mention'd, that *they declared plainly, that they sought an Heavenly Country*: Not by *Heb. 11. v.* a mere verbal Profession, but by *15, 16.* doing such things as more plainly signified the reality of their concernment for it, *viz.* By refusing the Grandeurs of the Earth, and despising the little Pageantries of this World. And what less can we do to testify the sincerity of our Christian Profession, who renounce the World in our Baptism, than freely to take our leave of it, so short a time before we go to our Graves?

In short, 'tis high time, when we are upon the confines of the other State, and can see Eternal Life Just before us, to Disengage our selves from the Distractions of this busy World, and to gain leisure before we Dye, to compose our Spirits, to perfect our Repentance, and to fetch off the Soil and Defilement we have contracted
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in the hurry of our Wordly Occasions, or by keeping too much upon the common Roads. Men especially, that have run through a World of Business, must have borrowed much Time from the Hours of Prayer, and other Religious Duties ; and should therefore make some kind of Restitution by giving their last Days to the peculiar Service of God, and not venture to go reeking out of this World, with a steam of Earthly Affections about them, into his immediate Presence.

To conclude, since *the Time of our Dissolution is at Hand, What manner of Persons ought we to be in all Holy Conversation and Godliness? Looking for and hastening unto the coming of the Day of Christ, the Glorious Day of our Redemption from Death, and Triumphing over all the Enemies of our Eternal Salvation?* Let us therefore bid adieu to all the flashy Delights and Impertinent Cares of this Transitory World : Let us lay aside every Weight that besets us, and fix our Conversation in Heaven : Let us raise our Spirits, and lift up our Heads with Joy, in Expectation of the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile Body, and make it like unto glorious Body, by His Mighty Power, which is able to subdue all Things unto himself ; To whom with the Father and Holy Spirit, be Ascribed all Honour and Glory, Dominion and Power, both now and ever, *Amen.*

T H E E N D.

